

50p / \$1.95

Journal of the Society for
Education in Film and Television
Winter 1972/73

8211.107548

Journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television

History/Politics/Cinema

French Cinema and the Popular Front: Goffredo Fofi

The Estates General of France, May 1968

'Left' Film Distributors: Jim Pines

Dziga Vertov: Masha Enzensberger

English Film Criticism: Sam Rohdie

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By printing a number of articles in this issue about significant meetings between film and politics, we see ourselves as developing *Screen's* policy in at least one important area. In the first issue of the new *Screen* (Vol 12 n 1, Spring 1970) a critique of the auteur theory was proposed as an urgent task. Criticising the theory Sam Rohdie wrote, 'Auteurs are out of time. The theory which makes them sacred makes no inroads on vulgar history. . . . The primary act of auteur criticism is one of dissociation – the auteur out of time and history and society is also freed from any productive process. . . .'

The articles in this issue go some way towards putting auteurs back into history. This is most evident in Goffredo Fofi's account of Jean Renoir's relations with the Popular Front in the last 1930's. From recent accounts of Renoir's work (and, as Fofi points out, interviews with Renoir himself), nobody would discover how centrally he was involved with the Front. A sustained engagement at the level of aesthetics, politics and economics is now presented as a marginal part of Renoir's career, not needing serious examination.

The Popular Front was not an experience peculiar to Renoir. Fofi's article is particularly suggestive in its account of the Front as a common experience, affecting a whole generation of French film workers including Marcel Carné, Jacques Becker, Jacques Prévert, Gaston Modot, Jean Grémillon, Marc Allégret.

Read together with Fofi's article, the documents produced by the Estates General of the French Cinema in 1968 that we reprint have an interest extra to their proposals for reconstructing the French film industry since they are evidence of another generation's response to a general political crisis. If *Screen's* attempt to situate the making of films within specific societies, at certain historical moments, within particular economic formations is at all successful, it should be impossible to write about Alain Resnais, Louis Malle, Jean-Pierre Mocky, Claude Chabrol and many others without taking into account their response to the events of May 1968.

In our discussion of film and politics there is an obvious absence. The articles dealing with the area are of a critical descriptive character. Missing is any theoretical discussion.

This absence must be noted for two reasons. First, over the past twenty years situating film-making within society, its politics and economics has been unpopular with some good cause. Earlier film writing was quite naive in the way it connected film-makers with production systems, political crises, social change. Films were joined with any political, economic or social happenings roughly contemporary with their making. Unexamined vulgar marxist or

liberal 'art and context' notions provided the basis for making easy links. If the suspicion generated by this naiveté is to be overcome a more rigorous and subtle explanation of the relationship will have to be developed.

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Second, in a journal that has stressed the need for theory, the absence of it is particularly embarrassing. We can only say in our defence that the production of theory is not as easy as we first thought, not so much a matter of pulling rabbits out of hats as, perhaps, we have made it seem. We have also become increasingly conscious that knowledge is needed as well as theory.

We are happy to publish a letter from Charles Parker in this issue. British readers will know that Charles Parker works in radio and television and is best known for his contributions to the Radio Ballads. A long term employee of the BBC he was recently prematurely retired. The BBC's publicly announced reasons for doing this are not very convincing. On the face of it the Corporation's act is one of simple social and aesthetic suppression.

ALAN LOVELL

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Goffredo Fofi

Editorial Note: This article was written in 1966 and published in a left-wing Italian magazine, Giovane Critica. (Goffredo Fofi, the author, is a left-wing Italian political militant, writer and cinema critic.) At the time the article was produced the right wing of the Italian Communist Party was waging a determinedly opportunist campaign to try to swing the rest of the Communist Party and groups to the left of the Party into an alliance with the Socialist Party (then in government with the Christian Democrats and two other smaller parties). The leader of the right wing of the Italian Communist Party then (as now) was Giorgio Amendola, to whom Fofi several times refers in the text. In Italy the objective was a single part of the left (the 'Partito unico'). Similar moves were afoot in France, though there the alliance was that of Communists and Socialists behind a single candidate for the French Presidency – François Mitterrand. The introductory section of Fofi's article is largely concerned with these developments.

One day 'Renoir summoned us to the Communist Party Congress. I was hesitant, I'd never been involved in politics. But Renoir said that I had to decide whether to come or not. So I went, out of friendship for him. All his friends were there, and a rather nice, fat man whom I didn't recognise. I went up to this man and took him by the arm and said "Hello, who are you?" All the others started laughing – I didn't understand why. The man smiled and said to me, "But I know who you are." And then someone took it upon himself to introduce me to Maurice Thorez. Thorez found the incident amusing, and invited me to sit next to him on the platform (. . .)."¹

That is how the delightful Nadia Sibirskaia, the little laundress in *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1935), got into the cast of *La Vie est à Nous* (1936), the film, directed by Renoir, which the French Communist Party produced for the 1936 election campaign. So it was almost by chance that she, like many others, was caught up in the wave of enthusiasm for the Popular Front's programme. Forced to choose, she spontaneously sided with the workers and all 'decent people' against the blue shirts and the 'Croix de feu', the supporters of Mussolini and Hitler. Many more were swept along in this same wave of enthusiasm, perhaps on a weak ideo-

* From *Giovane Critica* 10, Winter 1966 and translated and reprinted here with the permission of the Editors.

6 logical basis, but with vigour and purpose. The movement they joined was – in 1936 – on the brink of revolution. Between February 6, 1934 and November 30, 1938, it experienced every vicissitude, from exaltation to dejection, from confidence to confusion, from stagnation to crisis. It was a confused, controversial period and all the basic political and ideological elements within it will one day have to be analysed. The cinema, like the other arts – and indeed more than the rest – had its own part to play in the history of this period, sharing, with only slight qualifications, the fate of the national economy in general. Art was impelled by the need for commitment, even if this was only, obviously, among the most politically conscious writers and directors.

There are still no general histories or complete accounts of this period, much less any account of the basic relationship between culture and politics in this period, though the protagonists were men of the standing of Gidé and Malraux, Breton and Nizan, Aragon and Eluard. A wide-ranging debate had already begun in France (and in Spain, England, the USA, and Czechoslovakia), similar to that which raged in Italy with the Liberation, the appearance of *Il Politecnico*,^[1] the cultural policies of the Italian Communist Party, and the publication of Gramsci's works.^[2] The issue was the artist's relationship to the working class, the revolution, and Communist ideology. The debate continued right up until the 1938 crisis and the Second World War.² Not only is there no complete or adequate discussion of the subject, even from a theoretical point of view: there is not even a general history of the Popular Front. There is only one book dealing with the period in general, which was published just a few months ago, and it is far from satisfactory.³ With rare exceptions,⁴ histories of the Third Republic summarily dismiss the subject in a few pages. Some studies in English, to judge from their titles, are of considerable interest, but they are virtually unknown in France and Italy, and I have been unable to consult them.⁵ There is, finally, an immense number of pamphlets, booklets, articles and memoirs, important sources for any study, although their variety may disorient the student who does not begin with a clear vision of the period.⁶

Is it too early for a sincerely dispassionate account? One might think not, in spite of the many varying interpretations of the period. But my position is that any discussion about issues with a bearing on the present day, which therefore involves taking up a militant interventionist stand, is bound to resort to all kinds of manipulation rather than impartial investigation. The Popular Front was, above all, the highest expression of the ideology of a whole period of crisis in the working class movement. That ideology is still with us: I would go so far as to say that we can in fact expect to see a resurgence of it. It could almost have been foreseen that with the crisis of the centre-left coalition in Italy, and the debate about

left-wing party unification, there would be a return to this ideology, on a theoretical as well as a practical level, as part of the search for a historical and doctrinal rationale for policies such as Amendola's.^[3] In fact Amendola undertook this task quite consciously⁷ when he turned to the study of Dimitrov,^[4] and found support for his theses – admittedly without great effort – in Gramsci and Togliatti.^[5] (At the same time he takes great care not to mention that Dimitrov, the theoretician of the Popular Front at the 7th Congress of the Third International,⁸ was also Stalin's spokesman in the Comintern.^[6] He should, then, have included Stalin in his list of illustrious predecessors.) But to return to France and to the prospects opened up by the recent elections there, the idea of the Popular Front and its rallying cries have become current once more, and it can be taken for granted that there will be a widespread revival of the debate over class alliances (between bourgeoisie, proletariat, peasants and intellectuals) for 'bread, liberty and peace', the main demand of 1936, even then just as evasive and meaningless as the three-point demand of 1789. Mitterrand has repeatedly said that '1966 will see the revival of 1936.'⁹

Ten years ago a survey by the *Temps Modernes*¹⁰ demonstrated that the memory of the Front was still strong enough to divide the French (excluding the younger generation whose knowledge of the Front was limited to the few erroneous lines in their history textbooks) into two camps, right and left. The two positions are no longer so black and white. On the right, the memory of the great fear of June 1936 is enough to unite opinion. But on the left, there is if anything more division than at the time of the Front itself. The Communists are the most zealous in their allegiance to the memory of the Front, and predict its return, but do not withhold their criticism of the manoeuvres of Blum and the socialists which made it impossible 'to form a government based on the extra-parliamentary activity of the masses, to fight fascism and the privileges of capital: on the contrary, they disrupted the Front and little by little, drained its determination to fight'.¹¹ The Communists hold that their own record was spotless, and if they did make mistakes it was only the result of placing too much trust in the SFIO.^[7] The SFIO, after enduring Monsieur Blum's weakness and vacillations, and the collapse of 1938-39, had the experience of seeing several of its leaders (Faure first among them) going over to Vichy. Today the SFIO accuses the Communists of criticising 'an experiment they did not even initiate and which they began denouncing us for betraying only a few weeks after it had begun'.¹² At the same time they attack the industrialists who totally boycotted the government by sending their capital abroad and financing the 'cagouleurs', despite Blum's offer to save them from the revolutionary upsurge of 1936 and from the occupation of their factories (a point which is rarely mentioned, even though

8 it is blatantly obvious). Finally, the SFIO turns on its own dissident groups, the Trotskyists and the supporters of Pivert, who were eliminated with some haste and completely neutralised. The Radicals, last of all, prefer to forget all about that period, and merely talk of the 'Republican Front'.

The Front is still a subject of discussion and a cause of division, but only in the limited political and intellectual world that both the Communist Party and the Right cultivate in their own way. Only the Commune, on a broader scale, inspires more heartfelt partisanship, for and against – equally uncritically, but with better justification.

The myth also appears in the realms of culture, and particularly in the cinema, which I shall deal with in greater detail here. The Front has all too often been identified with Gabin's portrayal of the worker wearing his beret on the side of his head and with Renoir's smiling, expansive national bonhomie, but this is hardly a good reason for not attempting to clarify a subject which I think has been neglected. Sadoul, for example, an historian and a man who himself played a part in the events of the period, has certainly not done this, nor have the few Italians who have written general and usually superficial articles on the subject. But this is not my only motive for looking at this period, and at some future time I should like to examine other aspects of it. I have already noted that the idea of the Front is again being raised, or will be: studying it, even just studying specific aspects of it, may help us to clarify our ideas about the present. Our view of the past should not be gratuitous, and I for one am not a detached observer.

I

The coming of sound threw the *avant-garde* into confusion and gradually destroyed them. Epstein, Dulac, L'Herbier^[8] and others either stopped working altogether or turned to more remunerative tasks, some of them sinking very low. *L'Age d'Or*, made in 1930, was both the end of the period and its revolutionary high point. The fascists who smashed up the Studio des Ursulines, shouting 'Death to the Jews' and 'Vive Chiappe', had identified their enemy. In fact, Chiappe, the crude, efficient police chief connected with the extreme right, intervened and banned the film. This was not the last of his exploits, but it provoked Buñuel's undying hatred for him, and the vengeance Buñuel wreaks on him at the end of *Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre* has ensured him an unenviable place in history. By way of compensation, some young documentary directors made their debuts. They were educated in the experiments of the *avant-garde*, but unlike the 'masters', they demonstrated an ever-increasing interest in characters and settings that were firmly tied to reality, or in more aggressive subjects. Carné's *Nogent, Eldorado du Dimanche* (1930), deals with the pastimes of the people in a Marne village; Jean Grémillon's docu-

mentaries are full of affectionate attention for little-known, neglected sections of society. As early as 1926, he had made a documentary on *La Vie des Travailleurs Italiens en France*, which possibly influenced Renoir's *Toni*. The immigrant – Italian, Spanish or Polish – soon became part of a certain populist trend in literature and the cinema, a symbol of the benevolent internationalism reflected in Renoir, Duvivier and Chenal. In *Bâtir* (1931), and more particularly *Les Petits Métiers de Paris* (1932), Chenal produced two short films in the spirit of Dabit's novels: detailed, loving portraits, not without their own dramatic interest, of the world of the workers and the industrial suburbs. His feature debut was promising. *La Rue sans Nom* (1934), is probably the first film which could be called 'poetic realist',¹³ and it made use of many of the subjects and settings that were to become dear to Carné: the bistro dominated by the police spy and the gangster; the 'typical' melancholy thug; the mysterious prostitute who is in a way the guardian angel of the whole alley, and in the background, 'the uprooted Italians, navvies and bricklayers, who with their every breath think about the beautiful women they can never caress, who do battle with the police when they try to evict them from their hovels, who play sweet sad music on the harmonica at nightfall. . . .'

Carné and Chenal, then, were taking a road which was far from new and revolutionary. The literature of the time shows this. But the beginnings of a new school and manner were indicated in the vague melancholy of the city outskirts, in the sentimental, popular manner, in a barely discernible irony and a trace of self-satisfaction. Carné's invitation to 'come out onto the streets'¹⁴ is delivered in demagogic and simplistic terms. The new turn did not come from Chenal's 'nameless street'. (He in any case changed course and tried out, with varying success, all the possibilities of commercial films with intellectual pretensions.) Nor did it come from *Nogent*. With the real, destructive *avant-garde* (Buñuel and the surrealists) incapacitated by circumstances beyond their control, it was only with the appearance of Renoir and Vigo – whose career was tragically cut short at its very outset – that the French cinema freed itself of this dross and confronted reality on more open ground.

Curiously enough, the groundwork for the 1936 turn was laid, according to contemporaries, in a film by a director already established as a maestro. Clair was later to say in his own defence that at the time he had many friends on the 'extreme left' who had, he felt, influenced the film. He did not, however, mention the crisis brewing at that time in both the conquered and the victorious countries as a result of American control of the economy of post-war Europe. Unemployment was growing, and many saw the influx of machinery as the cause. In a fast-moving, lively scenario, the factory is presented as a prison. The only liberation from it is escape to the world of the tramp. The boss and the worker, still

- 10 good friends in spite of past hostility, happily forget their troubles in singing these words by Auric:

La liberté, c'est toute l'existence,
Mais les humains ont créé les prisons,
Les règlements, les lois, les convenances
Et les travaux, les bureaux, les maisons.
Ai-je raison?

Alors disons:

Mon vieux copain, la vie est belle
Quand on connaît la liberté,
N'attendons plus, partons vers elle,
L'air pur est bon pour la santé.
Partout, si l'on en croit l'histoire,
Partout, on peut rire et chanter,
Partout, on peut aimer et boire,
A nous, à nous La liberté¹⁵

(Freedom is everything in life.
But men have made prisons,
Rules, Laws, conventions,
Work, offices, houses.
Am I right?

So, let's say:

Old friend, life is beautiful,
When one knows freedom,
Let's wait no longer, let's go and find it,
Fresh air is good for the health.
Everywhere, if the story is true,
Everywhere one can live and sing,
Everywhere one can love and drink,
Give us, give us our freedom. . .)

(Translated in Lorrimer Scripts no 22)

Hardly revolutionary. Nevertheless, at the time, it seemed to be a genuine revolt against the inhumanity of the factory (never before presented on the screen in this form) and a call for liberation through the rediscovery of individualist values, even if they were of petit-bourgeois inspiration. The surrealists were right when they peremptorily dismissed it, typically enough, as 'counter-revolutionary',¹⁶ and so were the various workers who wrote letters to *l'Humanité*^[9] protesting about the ideology of the film and its superficiality.¹⁷ While some Paris cinemas were showing Clair's film again after an unsuccessful first run, elsewhere, during the Popular Front, frenetic applause greeted a film which perhaps had similar defects but was much more stimulating and brilliant. The points of identification between *Modern Times* (1936) and *A Nous la Liberté* are not due so much to their similar themes but to a common, subtly irrational, individualistic tendency that encour-

aged the applause of both the left and of certain sections of the right.¹⁸ The distance between the two films is, nevertheless, enormous. Chaplin's is a revolt, Clair's crude and uncomprehending.

In 1934 Clair attempted, with a film dealing with the problem of dictatorship, to make his 'reflection' on the modern world more profound. *Le Dernier Milliardaire* is a satire without claws and without sinew. Dictatorship and fascism are caused by pure and simple madness. Everything is lost in a ballet consisting only of clowns and mad or ingenuous men making quietist demands, as in his preceding film. A satire on dictatorship is, nonetheless, a satire on dictatorship, and the film – which was received coldly by the audiences in the suburbs – was greeted with loud whistles on the Champs Élysées.¹⁹ The reception given to Christian-Jacque's awful farce, *Le Père Lampion* was better. Appearing in the same year, it ridiculed dictatorship in the manner of a crass, indulgent low comedy.

At the same time two groups of directors, on the one hand, Benoit-Lévy (*La Maternelle*, 1932), Pagnol (*Marius*, director A. Korda, 1931; *Fanny*, director M. Allégret, 1933; *Jofroi*, 1933; *Angèle*, 1934), and, among the documentary film-makers, people like Dreville and Lacombe; on the other, Renoir (*La Chienne*, 1931; *Boudu sauve des Eaux*, 1932), Vigo (*A Propos de Nice*, 1930; *Zéro de Conduite*, 1932; *L'Atalante*, 1934), and the Prévert brothers (*L'Affaire est dans le Sac*, 1932), were looking for a concrete link (or confrontation) with contemporary French society, but they did not tread the same path for long. The first group stuck fairly consistently to their original positions, faithful to their own mediocrity. But the others were already, more or less consciously taking the road of revolt and aggression: their open-mindedness and the freedom of their technique made them in the best cases jubilant iconoclasts (the Prévert brothers, Renoir) or less happily (Vigo) anarchistic. Their early films set the tone for the best of the French cinema in the years that were to follow. The settings and the characters are all, or almost all, already established, and have an explosive, youthful energy. They are decidedly optimistic people, full of the will to change the world.

Yves Allégret's short film, *Prix et Profits*, or *La Pomme de Terre* (1933), is interesting for a number of reasons. Produced for pedagogical purposes by Célestin Freinet, the activist educationalist (at that time directly involved with the PCF, collaborator on the first *Clarté*, the spirit and force behind the 'Co-operative de l'Enseignement Laïque'), it was a short treatise on Marxist economics, applied to the story of a potato, from producer to consumer. . . .

It was, unfortunately, the only example of the genre, and was considerably enlivened by the extravagant imagination of the Prévert brothers. (They scripted and acted in the film.)

Prévert and the group he represented are the most direct precursors of the cinema of the Popular Front. The 'Prémices' group

- 12 and its subsequent divisions (caused almost entirely by the impossibility of establishing an equilibrium between the supporters of a 'théâtre artistique' – supported by Baty and Vitray – and those of a 'théâtre de choc', propaganda and protest – supported by the Party), gave birth to direct and contemporary spectacles, half-way between a circus and a review with sketches and songs, inspired by the German and Russian experiments. Proletarian, popular theatre, actively propagated by the 'October' group^[10] and Prévert, was already being developed in 1930. Le Chanois (still the Dreyfus of the time),^[11] Brunius^[12] Y. Allégret,^[13] and many other, belonged to it.²⁰ The fusion took place with *Monsieur Lange* and reached its peak in *La Vie est à Nous*.

II

On February 6, 1934, the attempted fascist and monarchist 'march on Paris' (which was, in fact, *in* Paris) gave birth to the Popular Front. A response was essential, and it came with the powerful joint demonstrations of the following days. It came also from the intellectuals, with a 'Committee of Vigilance', vigilance against fascism, of course, which was born and consolidated in those days. Started on the initiative of Alain, Langevin and Rivet, it united the best-known democratic intellectuals, from Malraux to Elie Faure to Marc Bloch, from the Communists to the surrealists. Among the 32 signatories of the famous 'call to struggle' of February 10²¹ there was only one representative from the cinema – apart from Jeanson, who at that time was only a journalist known for his brilliant polemics and spirited invective²² – and that was Jean Vigo, yet again in the vanguard. A few months later, just after *L'Atalante* opened to an inattentive Parisian public, Vigo died, and the great hopes for his influence on the cinema during the Front ended. It is certain that had he lived to intervene actively in the cinema this would have been fundamental, and would have produced a stronger, less generic style than that of Renoir and the Prévert brothers. But the cinema, no less than history, is not made of ifs. . . .

1934, then, is the year of the making of *Toni*. It was released at the start of 1935, with hesitant support from Pagnol as producer. His backing, in any case, evaporated quickly.²³ The hopes for a new cinema focused on Renoir. It is strange that this gloomy, earthy drama of immigrants in the Midi, authentic precursor of neo-realism, and in retrospect, more valid than some of our post-war 'masterpieces', was disliked by some Communist critics. Renoir was not as yet in contact with the left, and the pessimistic tone of this passionate drama was viewed negatively by those in the labour movement with a populist, rose-coloured vision, who saw the 'social' only in optimistic declarations and in the depicting of a few disagreeable members of the bourgeoisie. After praising Pagnol's 'plein air' southern atmosphere, the critic of the Com-

munist weekly, *Regards*, went on to say that the theme of the film 'is not worth recording. We are amazed that cinéastes of such ability as Pagnol and Renoir waste so much of their energy on something so meagre. It is an insignificant little news item, a plot thick with thefts and murders, totally unconcerned with drawing any social meaning'.²⁴

As the situation became more politicised, with the move towards unification around the Front both from organisations and from the base, every show and every form of artistic expression had to be catalogued, discussed, accepted or rejected on the basis of its political content. A film was either 'revolutionary' or 'counter-revolutionary': there were no in-between shades for contemporary left-wing critics. A film was judged by this yardstick even though the two terms did not, as yet, have the meaning they were later to acquire in the Stalinist period. Certain surrealist documentaries were thus 'revolutionary' as were some American films of minimal social interest but which, nevertheless, destroyed or upheld, attacked or raised, or more simply, defended principles such as love and solidarity. The Marx brothers' films, for example, were revolutionary. Their explosive, liberating impact enthused the young people as much as the best of Chaplin.

Feyder's *La Kermesse Héroïque* (1935), quite decidedly 'counter-revolutionary', opened in mid-1935. It aroused the most furious debates, which were to continue until 1939 and were re-opened when the film was revived in Paris in 1965. This spicy Flemish farce, whose political content Feyder and Spaak claim never to have consciously considered, is, in fact, not without interest given the themes: 'Passive resistance' to an invader – which runs into collaboration – is a problem which was sadly to return in 1938-9 with the approach of war; the 'virile' attraction of the energetic invaders compared with the gross hypocrisy of a bourgeoisie at the height of its power. The film's career was seriously damaged. The Nazis and the Catholics detested it. The left attacked it. Today one can see a clear connection with Renoir's film, but only in the script (Chapier, etc). Feyder's farce and Renoir's film provided, in their different ways, a precise analysis of the bourgeoisie's reaction to fascism. Both announced Vichy. But they differ so much in values and spirit that it is not possible to take the comparison any further. Feyder's film is a careless joke, made in 1935, which ambiguously appeals to the French bourgeoisie's profound sympathy for fascism. The film, itself, shows signs of such a sympathy, and, whether unconsciously or not, it is an expression of it. Whereas Renoir's film is a sad and pitiless vision of a world undoing itself a mere few weeks and days before the outbreak of war. Its chilling lucidity hides nothing, not even the author's clearly agonised attitude. He sees himself as a part of that world. He sees all the tragic unawareness in its frivolity, its cruelty, and its pathos.

The first film with any just title to expressing the ideology of the Front is Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*. It is permeated with all the enthusiasm and hope that enlivened the people of France during those years. The same joy that the men in the factories were to feel when they again saw themselves on the screen during those magnificent days in 1936, is recognisable and reflected in it.²⁵ Renoir had a great deal of freedom while making it, but on completing the script he clearly realised how much he lacked a participant's knowledge of the milieu and the hopes that he wanted to describe. He turned to Prévert and to the 'October Group', and asked for their collaboration. Their influence is so palpable that Bernard Chardère wrote: 'The credits need changing: *Le Crime de M. Lange* – a film by the October Group – technical assistant: Jean Renoir'.^{25a} His conclusion is perhaps exaggerated, but it contains a lot of truth. It is a shame that the collaboration of Renoir and Prévert lasted for only one film. Prévert was probably the first to tire of the ideological framework in which the Party was trying to shut its members. Particularly as he had brought from surrealism and anarchism a solidly individualistic attitude which rejected any regimentation, and was ill-able to support a political group beyond the period of revolt and protest. Nor is Renoir exempt from this tendency. He did, after all, make *Boudu*, and what united him with Prévert was precisely a spirit of conscious revolt against cops, priests and the bosses. In addition to defining these previously imprecise elements of revolt, Prévert brought Renoir round to support the position of the proletariat, or, at least, the proletariat as Prévert, like so much of the literature of the period, knew it or thought it to be; the world of seamstresses, washerwomen, workers in the small artisan workshops that abounded in almost every part of the city. This was not the world of the factory worker, which neither Renoir nor Prévert was ever to depict. That was too remote and incomprehensible (though Prévert had dealt with this theme with the October Group theatre in 1933-4). Renoir for his part, contributed his immense intuition as a director, an almost instinctive capacity for giving the images a rhythm, gathering the most significant aspects of real life together and going straight to the point with a total disregard for established rules or orthodox canons. He was able, in his direction of the actors, to translate the spirit of 'chorality' in Prévert's script into images that are full of life and imagination. Precise and to the point as it is, it also has an important message which is presented with delightful nonchalance. When Batala, the printing house boss, returns after he has been ruined and his business has been taken over and started up again successfully by a co-operative of his employees (he returns, dressed as a priest – no less!) Lange kills him (and with his dying breath he grotesquely calls for 'A priest, a priest'). Lange flees. He can do nothing about the police,

but the laundress, who is in love with him accompanies him and tells their story (the whole film is a flashback of her story) to the frontier guards and customs men. They let him pass. They, too, are on his side, in solidarity with him. The message is emphatic and conclusive, but even though its force is maximised by the feelings aroused by the story, which is so simple and straightforward, it is barely noticeable. It is a film that could only have been made during that period. It opened during the 1936 New Year's holiday. . . .

This was Prévert's most intelligent and successful contribution to the diffusion of the Front's ideology. His capacity to reduce general themes to key, immediately identifiable characters who are never simple stereotypes is such that he can get across even the most apparently advanced ideas with the greatest ease. (Jules Berry's incomparable Batala for example is so brilliant that he provokes a certain sympathy for the 'baddies' which was typical of the revolutionary literature in that period and which plays quite an important role in creating Renoir's carousel atmosphere. In the end it is a shame that he has to be eliminated. He, the likeable 'baddie', is the basis for later Renoir characters, right up to Doctor Cordelier.) The path is still the path of optimism and faith. Unity is power. Solidarity can overcome everything. Economic problems will be resolved with good will and co-operation,²⁶ class co-operation. 'Capital' is eliminated, but the intellectual – to be precise, the author of Western novels – the doorman, the laundresses and the typographers, and in the end even the border guards, who are, after all, still police, all take part. Life is ours . . .²⁷

During these months France was full of expectations of great and imminent change. It was almost a regeneration. Renoir's film at once expresses this atmosphere and contributes to it. The success of *Monsieur Lange* gave Renoir, through Prévert, the opportunity for more intimate contact with progressive intellectuals and politicians, in particular with the Communists. Prévert, for his part, managed everywhere to deal with themes similar to those in *Monsieur Lange*. His activity was never again to be so varied and frenetic: theatre (the October Group), music-hall (songs he wrote for Marianne Oswald that were sung at all the left's large demonstrations and cultural meetings), poetry, journalism and cinema, invective, a love song, a vehement protesting article (for example, those on borstals in *La Fleche*²⁸), a satire. All weapons were valid for explaining oneself or for stimulating action. This was particularly so in the cinema, with his work on the commentary for *Ténériffe* (1932), a documentary shot by Eli Lotar and Y. Allégret, which was made instead of an unsuccessful project on *Las Hurdes* and which in its turn gave Buñuel the idea for his film; *Ciboulette* a satirical 'féerie musicale' for Autant-Lara; and the Marx Brothers-type gags in *L'Affaire est dans Le Sac*, while even Richard Pottier's small film, *Un Oiseau Rare* (1935), demonstrates

16 his destructive aggressive spirit. Even though the farce upon which it is based is of no interest, the ideas and the satire that permeate the film make it a notable work, full of the spirit of the year.

1936 was a great year for the cinema, too. It was certainly the year in which enthusiasm for the imminent or accomplished victory enveloped the left-wing intellectuals, to the extent that it was bound to be reflected in their works. The most accomplished films were released in 1937, but 1937 was a difficult year for a number of reasons. The cul-de-sac in which Blum had placed the Front (together with the Communists about turn), made it a year of crisis. The 1936 revolution that never was had its effect. But, nevertheless, an impressive number of projects were begun in 1936. At least three of them deserve to be analysed with great care.

IV

Ciné-Liberté, the association for an independent cinema, was the most interesting experiment. Its birth, growth and ending ran parallel with the political and cultural evolution of the Front. It was linked with the PCF and with the Maison de la Culture, run then by Aragon, Malraux and Nizan among others, but in accordance with the Party's policy towards the Front and their allies it was fairly open to people with different political positions. When the association subsequently set up a production company, its activity becomes of particular interest for us. But I shall start at the beginning.

The Communists were not the first to put forward the idea of using the cinema politically. The initiative came from the old Seine SFIO federation, one of whose leaders, Marceau-Pivert, had always been interested in the cinema. He was to have important responsibilities in this sector as a minister in the Front government (but neglected them because of more serious problems). The first example of this type of cinematic activity dates from May 1935 when some of the Federation's young amateur film makers made a short documentary of the huge unity rally at the Mur des Fédérés.^[14] The following year the same – more or less anonymous – group produced another documentary about the attempted assassination of Blum (February 13) which was subsequently shown all over France and which contributed significantly to the creation of the Blum myth, a variety of the personality cult glorifying the old 'grand seigneur'. This cult was to have grave consequences, outside as well as within the SFIO. The group went on to make other propaganda documentaries and political-didactic films, some of which were cartoons that dealt with the most varied aspects of domestic and foreign policy. But this initiative did not provoke much similar activity, restricted as it was to the party and to amateur film makers with nothing much to say. A medium-length political film which utilised some of the group's film material was

made later on but I have been unable to trace it. When in June 1938 the situation had already radically changed and the enthusiasm of 1936 had already been corrupted and contaminated by the pseudo-pacifist confusion of 1938, when the working class had grown disillusioned and closed in on itself, and the revolutionary moment had passed, Pivert and his group (finally!) broke with the Party and founded the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan (Trotsky was to criticise this severely: how can a socialist party be a workers' and peasants' party at the same time?). Pivert's party later made a documentary about the Popular Front entitled *Contre le Courant*. Pivert himself did the commentary, and judging by the quotations from it in Guérin's book, it is clear that the film is extremely interesting.²⁹ I will come back to this later.

Early in 1935, the Communists became involved in the film society movement. This was the first step towards direct involvement which came in 1936. At this stage their involvement was limited to the presentation and discussion of films. There was also a 'cinema' group in the AEAR (Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires) which also organised film shows from time to time. The Communist association called 'Spartacus' had been showing sub-titled Russian films on a fairly regular basis since 1926. When the AEAR set up the Maison de la Culture (in the rue d'Anjou) in 1936, the cinema section became the 'Alliance du Cinéma Indépendant'. In preparation for the April-May elections, the Party set aside a sum of money to make a propaganda film. But the Alliance shrewdly asked for the help of artists who had, up to that point, not been directly involved in the group. Renoir came forward, and he was given the responsibility for making the film. A little later the Alliance changed its name to 'Ciné-Liberté'. Renoir remained the central figure. He was not merely a prestigious name on the letter-head. His activities multiplied and his influence attracted many others. Cinéma-Liberté was born some time in March 1936.³⁰ But before this, other groups had pioneered its type of activity and contributed to its birth. In 1935 the Syndicat Générale du Cinéma had organised³¹ a series of film shows and get-togethers for film people and the general public. The objectives of this exercise were to establish 'cultural groups' of film workers providing them with the opportunity of better understanding the problems of their profession, and to create a 'cinemagoers' union' that could support the technicians' union in its struggle against censorship and dubbing. Jeanson and Jean Painlevé were the initiators and the spokesmen of this project. In addition throughout the whole of 1935 there were film shows and discussions at the Bellevillois cinema (in the poorest most proletarian district of Paris)³² as well as shows put on by various groups from the FTOF (Fédération des Théâtres Ouvriers de France), etc. The ground was therefore prepared for more advanced projects. But large-scale involvement came only with the birth of Ciné-Liberté and its appeal for unity, which

18 directly touched the SFIO militants and sympathisers, the Radicals, in short, the leftwing intellectuals and young people. The membership list is impressive: Renoir, Feyder, Marc Allégret, Moussinac, Picasso, Sadoul, Unik, Jeanson, Jovet, Dulac, Chenal, Modot, Lefèvre, Stève Passeur, Dullin, etc. The best of the French cinema is present here in dynamic and vital contact with other cultural sectors. Similar groups were set up: Radio-Liberté, for the radio; a research group of young architects gathered around Le Corbusier; another made up of young painters around Léger and Picasso; and naturally the writers, whose contribution was the most substantial and obvious.

With the euphoria of the Front's coming to power – if one can call it that, remembering the polemic to which the PCF as well as the SFIO were to return periodically about the difference between socialist power and running a government still within the capitalist state – the initiatives became increasingly less revolutionary. The cinema offensive was over. Instead the tone became one of defending and democratising the cinema. It is not by chance that the accent was placed on three fundamental elements: the contact between technicians, film makers and the public; the production of independent films that would give young film makers the opportunity to work and to develop; the production of spectacular democratic films in collaboration with the mass organisations (the State if necessary, but more often the various unions, the unified CGT,^[15] and the parties).

The 'people's great leap forward in culture' which followed the days of February 1934, was a genuine new movement. It required some response and, at the same time, it needed to be controlled. The alliance's ideology was to be one of unity, therefore vague; an ideology of the nation, therefore ambiguous, the *Marseillaise* alternating with the *Internationale* (because the Stalin-Laval agreement had left its mark, and because Thorez, who was at first reluctant about the alliance, set in motion that form of concealed nationalism which was to produce perhaps the most telling effect of all the Front's policies on the European Communist parties – including, much later, that of post-war Italy). It was positive, therefore often demagogic or lachrymose; defensive, therefore always weak. As the films were paid for by the parties and the unions, who 'asked for films that exalt national industries, the contribution made to them by the workers, their talent, their art',³³ they necessarily reflected the confusion typical of every reformist movement and of the left's participation in and support for a government. The workers will no longer be exploited and rebellious. They will collaborate in the national effort for the nation's progress . . . But I must not get too far ahead. First I shall discuss the preparations for the 1936 elections. *La Vie est à Nous* contains the seeds of all the elements we have mentioned, but the election was not yet won. Its tone is therefore always one of attack. Since his film

is, unfortunately,³⁴ not well known, I shall analyse it in some detail. 19

V

At a recent showing of his films,³⁵ Renoir was asked about this film. The brevity of his answers is significant: (the questions are indicated by italics)

Do any prints of La Vie est à Nous still exist?

I think so, but I do not have one.

How did it come to be made?

I was the producer, in the American sense of the word. I was in charge of the film but we were a team. Le Chanois, Zwobada, Cartier-Bresson and myself. Each one made a part. I supervised the whole thing.

What was your political position?

I was not a Communist nor were the majority of the team.

But was it, in some way, a part of the enthusiasm of 1936?

Obviously.

Renoir's laconic attitude and the fact that the film is held by the Party, rather than by the Cinémathèque, has made showings of the film extremely rare. Few people, beyond the most persevering critics, have ever seen it. A 'film maudit', therefore, whose director worried by a compromising past, even though he has never totally rejected the film, is careful not to throw much light on.

The film was made very quickly so that it could be used for the election campaign. Faithful to the undertaking of 'openness' demanded by the policy of unity of the left and by the need to attract allies, the supervision of the film was entrusted to Renoir because of all the French directors he was closest to the Front's ideals (as he had demonstrated in *Lange*) and because, of all the young directors, he was undoubtedly the most promising. But the script was written very quickly under the probably strict supervision of Vaillant-Couturier. It was a political film financed by the Party, so that even though Renoir had a considerable degree of freedom in making it, the ideas contained in the film had to be those of the PCF.³⁶

The film opens with a series of images of France's wealth. Nature provides the best of these. The images are part of a lesson in school presented by a teacher-commentator. The children, who are all poor, leave the classroom and go out into a dark street asking themselves 'but then why are we so poor?' Their discussion is about familiar sufferings: poverty, hunger, unemployment, daily squalor. The camera pans from the fence, in front of which the children's conversation is finishing, to a mound on which stand about a dozen young men all wearing similar overalls. It is the workers' chorus, a combination of the October Group's usual practice and the FTOF's 'spoken chorus'.

Ladies and gentlemen
 forgive our indiscretion
 but we are curious people
 and we want an explanation.
 France is a rather rich country
 where you can find most anything
 but the poor man eats dry not fresh bread.
 France is a fertile country
 where the harvests are magnificent
 but the homeless unemployed
 has only the crumbs of others.
 France is a prosperous country
 you can live like a king here
 but a father sees his own children
 dying of cold in the attic.
 Kind ladies and gentlemen,
 forgive our indiscretion
 but we are curious people
 and we want an explanation.
 What happens to the grain and the flowers
 that grow in the soil of France?
 Who owns the fields and who owns the mines?
 Who owns the ports and who owns the forests?
 Who owns the banks, who owns the workshops?
 Who owns the grain, who owns the minerals?
 Who pushes the young to suicide
 and forces the women to abort?
 Why is your plate always empty
 and your son without clothes?
 Kind ladies and gentlemen
 Forgive our indiscretion,
 but we are curious people
 and we want an explanation.
 There are two hundred families in France;
 who are the cause of your hunger.
 They have boardrooms
 that are really bandits' lairs.
 There they reduce your share.
 There they strip your children.
 France does not belong to the French
 but to two hundred families.
 France does not belong to the French.³⁷

(Editorial Note: *The text is not heard thus in the film, only snatches are heard – see Beylie letter in Positif no 115, April 1970.*)

The text is illustrated by a series of drawings by Jean Effel, the well-known Communist caricaturist. [Editorial Note: *Jean Effel only did one drawing not a series – see Beylie letter.*] There are

also living examples of the two hundred families, drawling voices, cretinous speeches, playing golf in a château, and we see their representatives. A company chairman (Brunius) speaks of the need for laying off workers. We see the February 6 parade of the Camelots du Roi^[16] and the Croix-de-feu with Colonel de la Roque in the lead. He is as grotesque and comic as Mussolini is in *All'Armi Siam Fascisti!* (1961) (though in this case Renoir and Brunius took the liberty of tampering with the editing and even the frames so as to make his movements even more mechanical and puppet-like). In a rapid sequence edited by Brunius in masterly fashion,³⁸ there is a short description of the characteristics of international fascism: brown shirts, blue shirts, black shirts, the Ethiopian war, Hitler, the symbols of the right, a skull. A 'petit-bourgeois' is watching a fascist march, and he says, 'You can't do anything about them'. A young worker standing beside him replies, 'What? Can't do anything? There's the Communist Party'. This conversation ends the first part of the film (in the manner of a hair cream commercial). The analysis of the evils which afflict France can be tersely summarised: the two hundred families and their puppets provoke unemployment, poverty, war. Now, the positive part. In a series of striking images (in large part supervised by Cartier-Bresson, whose photographs of the suburbs were at the time appearing in *Regards*) we see *Huma*^[17] being sold in various parts of France. Then, from the *Huma* editorial offices in Paris we move into Cachin's office. The mustachioed editor opens three letters which serve as an introduction to the film's three sketches.

In the first a worker argues with his foreman. He is sacked. His workmates go on strike until he is re-hired (the episode was directed by Le Chanois).

In the second, a bailiff wants to confiscate the furniture in a peasant house, but the arrival of Gaston Modot, a robust and meddlesome Communist peasant, and of other neighbours, rapidly dissuades him (this smooth and good humoured episode is Becker's more than promising directorial debut). The third is the best, directed by Renoir, and worked out by Unik. After the factory and the country, we find ourselves among the middle classes who are also oppressed by unemployment and poverty. A young engineer lives with his girlfriend in a squalid attic (Bertheau and Nadia Sibirskaja). He has been out of work for some time. He is desperate. He looks for work which he eventually finds in a garage working beside an exploited North African (immigrants again . . .) only to be sacked almost immediately because of an argument with a powerful dandy who then immediately offers him aid and protection if he joins his group, the Croix-de-feu. The dandy hands him a tract and since we, like the protagonist, at first think it is money, the discovery that it is not is even more irritating than that provoked by our initial impression, charity with strings attached

- 22 René ends up in the unemployment queue. But there is nothing here either, and René, hungry and exhausted, faints on the pavement. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the bourgeoisie pass by him commenting, 'another drunk'. Then two young Communists come along, help him to his feet, and bring him to their local party headquarters, where a stage show is being rehearsed. In the happy world of Communist youth, René finds what he has been looking for, and, when he has regained his strength, he helps with the preparations, as an electrician. He is doubly proletarianised, professionally and politically. On the improvised stage another speaking chorus – illuminated by René working the lighting – recites:

Comrade, you are never alone.
In the deepest poverty
You are never alone.
The sky is dark.
The future black.
Life seems desperate for you
Have courage, comrade,
Because you are never alone.
Miner, a star has risen
In the depths of the mine where you sweat.
Worker, a hope has been born
Among the deafening machines which surround you.
You who are unemployed, there is someone
Who is trying to find work for you.

[Editorial note: The song you hear in the film is quite different – see Beylie letter].

Thorez, Cachin, Duclos give their concluding speeches and the film ends with a march that swells and swells to the accompaniment of the *Internationale*. First, a group of peasants headed by Duclos fills the screen, then the workers, the blacksmiths, the miners, the students, the seamstresses, and children. An ever-growing crowd marches towards the camera:

C'est la lutte finale
Groupons-nous et demain
L'Internationale sera le genre humain.

The film lacks neither energy nor enthusiasm. The sincerity of its makers is unquestionable. We are carried along by this wave of hope marching towards a better tomorrow. It is excellently made; a model for a difficult genre; it can only be compared with the films of the silent Russian cinema. The most diverse experiments are, here, linked and intertwined, and everything is taken in in giant strides. The lessons of Russian montage and the experiments of

Ruttmann, the lessons of proletarian theatre (with its spoken chorus and its sketches), Renoir's past work (*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*) and the birth of Cartier-Bresson's photographic art can all be found in it. The amalgam is effective and solid, for all its summary spontaneity.

One could complain about a few too many *Internationales* and too much dialogue, but that is not a point I wish to pursue here. A political propaganda film must be judged, first of all, on political grounds. The slogans also demand comment. And here, one cannot but note its oversimplistic schematisation: all evil comes from the 'two hundred families' and their political representatives on the extreme right. This is not analysis but an ideological operation of the most cursory kind. The same is true of the few references to foreign affairs: the shot of the massacred Ethiopian and the few references to international fascism are borrowed from a more than generic anti-fascism. It is obvious that the Party's concerns were immediate (the elections) and that the slogans had to be brief and punchy. Thus, the identification, 200 families = fascism seemed more immediate than 200 families = the government in power. Capitalism is reduced to a series of remarks which explain little. The alternative that the film proposes is defence against the 200 hundred families rather than the capitalist State, or the system. References to socialism are very rare, to Soviet Russia, non-existent. The Party no doubt wanted to avoid frightening potential middle-class voters as well as provoking left-wing attacks on the 1935 Stalin-Laval pact. Nothing, of course, on the church or the army. The sketches deal with problems which are no different from those dealt with by the other left-wing parties and, to a lesser extent, by the Radical Party: unemployment among workers and intellectuals; evictions and sackings as examples of peasants' and workers' daily difficulties. It is, in short, the programme of a benevolent protection society, an insurance company. This is the area in which the Front's valid victories were, in any case, won: paid holidays, protection of the 'less well-off' classes, old age pensions, and so on. On the international level, the fascist spectre was staved off but for how long?

This film is typically Frontist in the sense that it illustrates perfectly the Communist Party's meagre revolutionary outlook at that time (and since . . .). It is also a significant fact that the direction of the film was, in large part, entrusted to allies who, like Renoir – the fiery declarations of the period notwithstanding – were putting forward essentially bourgeois demands for a sincere, but hardly extreme, adjustment. These demands did not survive the disillusion provoked by the Front's crisis.

VI

Strikes broke out here and there early in June and they spread rapidly. After the elections and the Front's massive victory, Blum's

24 'wait-an-see' attitude, his desire to form a government with his hands clean and according to democratic constitutional rules, caused a renewed economic crisis. The more frightened industrialists started sending their money abroad (to Switzerland, as usual). The anti-inflation laws and decrees of the governments which came to power after February 6, 1934, had their effect on wage-earners. The combination of all these things provoked a wave of collective revolt and hope the likes of which France had not before seen in this century. Revolt and hope because the Front had won, and – in the opinion and the feeling of the working class – it was necessary to give it one final push, to back Blum in his struggle, and, perhaps unconsciously, to force his hand. It was a revolutionary moment.³⁹ From Le Havre to Toulouse to Paris the working class chose not simply to strike but to occupy the factories, which in such moments is much more dangerous, thus unexpectedly confirming Rosa Luxemburg's theses – given the spontaneity, methods and inventiveness of the movement. The workers organised themselves everywhere, and everywhere the struggle assumed revolutionary proportions. Blum's reply to this revolutionary enthusiasm and energy was to offer to mediate. *Everything was possible*, and Blum, with the support of Thorez, chose the path of national reconciliation. With revolution staring him in the face, he opened his arms to the Radicals. The Communists, or rather the Stalinists, did not try to stop him, anything but. They were afraid of an upheaval that might prejudice the 1935 line established by Dimitrov and Stalin. Frightened and terrified, the industrialists conceded substantial and important reforms (the 40-hour week, paid holidays). Order was re-established. Blum was later to speak of this period in bitter and grotesque terms. He complained that the working class had not trusted him and that its 'social explosion (. . .)' was a slap in the face for his government'. He was fully aware of the fact that the bourgeoisie and the bosses 'thought and hoped [he was] – indeed, expected him to be – their saviour. The circumstances were so agonising, were so close to something approaching a civil war that the only hope was for providence to intervene (. . .) the coming to power of a man who had sufficient persuasive power to make the working class listen to reason and who could convince it not to use or abuse its power (. . .)'.⁴⁰ But what about the Communists? On June 12, Thorez wrote in *L'Humanité* that, 'Il faut savoir terminer une grève!' Fear of the consequences of prolonged factory occupations and the resulting general economic disorder, references to the 1935 congress of the International which had declared that the fight against international fascism must take the form of an alliance with the middle classes, faith in the parliamentary road to power . . . The revolutionary moment evaporated, and its decline was the beginning of the end.

The film world obviously was involved in the strikes. They had a considerable effect on it and discussions and fears were felt long

after the end of the strikes. The questions of the 40-hour week and of wages affected this sector in a variety of ways: an actor, for example, may very well not work his 40 hours in a regular way and thus may not earn in proportion to the technicians. Is it possible to regularise Juvet's salary or Gabin's, reduce them to a monthly salary, compare them to electricians and wardrobe assistants? The employers' organisations emphasised such arguments, and, naturally, won the day. But, in the meantime, they too had felt the great fear.

Production stopped, and distribution, too. The usherettes and cashiers went on strike. The artists and the technicians went on strike. Old films were shown in a few central cinemas. The newsreels came from Brussels. The Epinay, Billancourt, Joinville, and Neuilly studios were occupied by the technicians who organised pickets, family 'leave' rotas, and the internal life of the factory: meals, dormitories, cleaning. To pass the time, in addition to political discussions and improvised meetings, there were shows. Much the same thing happened in most factories. Sometimes an artist who belonged to the CGT arrived: the tireless and formidable Marianne Oswald sung in factory after factory, revolutionary songs from all ages, Prévert love songs. Film actors were more reluctant. With the exception of 'comrades' Modot, Bussi res, Gabriello and a few others, they stayed out of sight. But they were not necessary, for in every factory sketches, choruses, and *commedia dell'arte* stories were improvised. The boss, the priest, and the policeman were rigorously cudgelled. And naturally the projection rooms were full of activity: the film workers showed themselves old films, and discussed them, criticised them or simply watched them. In entire districts, the whole population took part in the carnival that lasted from the 7th to the 20th of June. The moving, and inspiring images of those days, which appeared in the newspapers, speak clearly. A CGT-Cin -Libert  crew went from factory to factory catching moments of the immense, collective movement. The crew was everywhere greeted with enthusiasm, and everywhere the clenched fist was raised. Red tattered cloth, somehow found, fluttered above the laughter of joy and of trust. P. Lemare edited this material together into a film entitled *Les Gr ves de Juin*. It is, I believe, still in the possession of the CGT.⁴¹

The fear and anger of the first days of the strikes receded. A kind of vague benevolence appeared in the journals of the distributors' and producers' associations. It was caused by an even deeper fear. They had begun seriously to think that the fatal day was not far off.⁴² But then they got their second wind and plunged once again into technical polemics and discussions. The employers' representatives argued that the cinema was not like any other industry, therefore it was not a question of class struggle but of common problems: 'What meaning can the class struggle have in an industry that is only a series of craft procedures in which everyone is alter-

26 natively boss and worker?'⁴³ The June upsurge brought with it union unification, gave birth to new organisations (Ciné Liberté, the Popular Front Association of Cinema Directors), and brought about the merger of a number of isolated unions, for example the National Union of French Film Craftsmen (the negotiations were handled by Benoit-Lévy) and the Union des Artistes du Spectacle, with the CGT. Some of the new ministers (Zay, education; Spinasse, economy; Lagrange, sport and leisure) seemed particularly interested in the cinema. In addition the prime minister nominated Pivert to a special post: radio and film propaganda for the Front. Union activity was intense. Management-union agreements followed each other in rapid succession. But it was pure chance that one of the first things the new government did about the cinema was to lift the sanctions that had been imposed against Italy as a result of its aggression against Ethiopia.

The producers reacted with co-productions (in particular with Hitler's Germany and Doctor Goebbels, no less) and by sending their capital abroad.⁴⁴ Renoir, who at the time was shooting *Une Partie de campagne* (1936) and preparing *Les Bas-fonds* (1936), tried to explain his position in a series of articles and interviews which are also useful for understanding and defining his relationship to the Party and the Front.

At the end of the year, Renoir invited producers and directors to think about the changes that had taken place. First, studio work had never been so regular and rapid as after the introduction of the new social legislation (for example, Renoir's experience on *Les Bas-fonds*) and similar conditions certainly did not exist either in Italy or in Germany, where a quality film took about three months to make. *Les Bas-fonds* was made in 24 days. Second, he asked them to recall the social conditions that existed prior to the June legislation: confusion and chaos, impatience and fury. If the producers go abroad perhaps the reason is credit and cost. The State must intervene in this sector to stop this. But for many producers it is perhaps also,

an attempt at sabotage. I would like to think that they are rare, but it is possible that this is the problem. For a few bad Frenchmen, it is a question of proving that the France of the Popular Front cannot live. To prove their ideas are right they do not hesitate to favour foreign competition. Maybe they have not thought about the fact that if they stimulate a tide of investment in Italy the French cinema will not be able to recover just by someone like Tardieu returning to power and waving his magic wand. Once sabotaged a cinema industry cannot recover just like that.⁴⁵

By the end of the year the balance sheet was not so black: 116 films, union agreements in all areas, the preparation of a report on

the cinema worked out jointly by the National Economic Committee, for the government, and the unions, the start of a productive dialogue.

27

VII

In 1936, or more precisely in the period stretching from the publication of the Rassemblement Populaire's programme in January to the decision, in January 1937, not to intervene in Spain (the civil war started in mid-July), hopes and enthusiasm were high. This was the year of the most audacious projects, the most far-reaching achievements, and the greatest support. In the theatre, with the direct intervention of the State and the unions (the former on a modest scale) in favour of popular theatre and with the production of Rolland's *14 juillet* at the State's expense; in sport and leisure activities, with the establishment of camping sites, youth hostels, 'explorers' organisations, after-school kindergartens, popular aviation clubs, etc. Pierre Cot, Lagrange and Zay (who was later shot by the Germans) put their names to these dynamic initiatives; in films, with a number of important and not so important films upon which the Front's influence is noticeable, with the activities of Ciné-Liberté and with the State's legislation and its intervention, minimal as it was, in production. *Jenny* (1936), *La Belle Equipe* (1936), *Les Bas-Fonds* (1936), *La Grande Illusion* (1937), *Gueule d'Amour* (1937), *Hélène* (1936), *Golem* (1936), etc, etc, were either started or finished during this period. A superproduction of *Saure* was announced, with Harry Bauer and Pierre Renoir, but it was never made. These were all films that the critics kindly saw as being full of Frontist ideology. It was also the year of *Modern Times*, *Fury*, and *You Only Live Once* (Lang), *The Good Earth* (Franklin), *The Wave*, or *Redes* (Zinnemann and Strand), *Things to Come* (Menzies and Wells), *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Hathaway), *To Mary with Love* (Cromwell), *The Black Legion* (Mayo), all part of a wave of progressive films that came from New Deal America and sometimes even from England.⁴⁶

Les Bas-fonds, like most of Renoir's films, came about by chance. As the good 'craftsman' he declared himself to be, Renoir was always sensitive to producers' interests. He knew how to choose from among the projects offered him the ones that were most adapted to his temperament, or those which would, at least, give him some opportunity to do what he wanted and allow him to give the film a personal tone. He turned down *La Belle Equipe*, because he had already made *Monsieur Lange*. He passed it on to Duvivier, who in 1936 also had some sympathy for the Front which had been demonstrated in *Golem* (Sadoul was enthusiastic about it, and saw in it – in the metaphorical content of the story – a democratic and anti-dictatorial film). For himself, he chose Gorky's *Lower Depths* from among the projects that Kamenka put up to him. On the basis of the available evidence, his choice of a subject

28 had to do in part with the fact that it had something of immediate relevance to say, and it was this, in addition to the limitations of time and money, that determined, with a certain imperturbable deliberation, the strange double identity of the film. It is set in Russia, and the characters all have Russian names, but it is also set in the outskirts of Paris, with characters moving and behaving as in his previous films. We must not forget that during this period Renoir also directed *Une Partie de Campagne* with the speed of someone who already knew to perfection his own style. In any case, the final decision about the film's setting came from the Communist Party.⁴⁷ The Party wanted to use the film indirectly as an act of homage to Gorky (who took a great interest in the script⁴⁸) and to produce a film 'à la russe', on the model of *The Childhood of Maxim Gorky* which had just been released, and of the populist films of the Soviet tradition. In short, it was to be both a homage to a writer and to a school and a demonstration of political good faith, as well as a defence and illustration of a style, the newly-born socialist realism. It is clear, however, that Renoir and Spaak managed in spite of everything to give the film a frankly personal tone: the anarchic taste for loners and derelicts, the typically Parisian dialogue, and Gabin, who assumed his classic role for the first time in this film. 'Pepel in his dark shirt, soft, low-brimmed hat, a showy cloth scarf, a swaying gait (. . .) an unmistakable native of Paris straight out of the "romans de la pègre", the books of Carco's milieu, one of André Salmon's "Tendres canailles"'.⁴⁹ The film is a tangle, in which it is difficult to distinguish between the chance and the intentional elements, between the original and the derived, between Maupassant and Gorky, between Russia and France.

Nevertheless, the atmosphere, the air that the film breathes, is unmistakably and frankly that of 1936, precisely because of this tangle, this mixture which appears to be not solely determined by the commercial considerations and the craft necessities that are a part of all Renoir's films. The tone is still optimistic. The moving homages to, among other things, *Modern Times* (1936) reveal this, (with Junie Astor representing Paulette Goddard, and the finale an explicit reference to the Chaplin film). The differentiation between Renoir and the Party, which never in fact wholly disappeared – not even, if one looks closely, in *La Vie est à Nous* – is already noticeable. Renoir had a predilection for the *narodniks*, the loners, marginal figures, vagabonds, rather than the solid working-class types demanded by the Party, and his taste for a direct pictorial narration which has little relation to the socialist realist model has its roots in French *fin-de-siècle* literature.

It is the prevailing mood of unity that links Renoir to the Front and to the French Communist Party. Apparently this mood was only a temporary tactical position for the Party, but for Renoir it was a deep ideological and emotional attachment rooted

in a national tradition which he supported and to which he felt he belonged. One of his characters in *La Règle du Jeu* (1939), was later to say: 'On this earth there is one thing which is terrible and that is that everyone has their own good reasons'. This is to anticipate future events, but both Renoir and the Front managed to reach a lot of people and to make their positions appreciated.

The fusion could last as long as Renoir's good faith and enthusiasm were echoed by the Party. When the Party's attitude became more schematic, the alliance began to crack. It was definitively destroyed by the discovery of the inadequacy of the Party's responses to the new situations and by an awareness of the shabby calculations behind such responses. Renoir's moral support was to become an equally moral refusal. The path from mistrust to a kind of cynicism was short.

Renoir's slow development, his gradual discovery of his own convictions and his own directional personality, can be traced in a series of choices which he was led to make by virtue of his sensitivity to the prevailing situation. *Toni*, *Lange*, *Partie*, and *La Vie est à Nous* helped him, in different ways, to define his domain and his stance, or, to be more precise, helped him to create his position. The culminating point of this evolution is *La Règle*, whose clarity and maturity was followed by a slow decline, manifest in his perception of a wretched reality and of a facile and 'spiritual' philosophy.

Les Bas-fonds, re-examined today, confirms the view of a critic (and a director) – for whom I otherwise have little regard. Roger Leenhardt saw, with the detachment of a relatively uncommitted Catholic:

... a disturbing progress. Disturbing, because the price of its acquisition was a spiritual slackening. And this is the danger. One feels, for the first time, that this film is not the result of a struggle either won or lost. It is 'predictable'. Unknown until yesterday, today everyone knows that Renoir is the left's director of genius. This climate is certainly not isolated from the imperceptible slide towards automatism, 'a job', the conventional, even if it is that of a subversive, and it cannot stop us being forewarned.⁵⁰

This judgment, that starts from debatable considerations (there is a certain contempt for Renoir's links with a contingent political situation), is, in large part, valid. It also applies to at least one of the great director's subsequent films. Renoir received an official honour at the end of 1936, the Prix Louis Delluc. The Party sent him an official letter of congratulation.⁵¹

Less relevant and more banal, *La Belle Equipe* demonstrates the line taken by Duvivier, a director whose tendency (namely, a contemptible cleverness) was very different from that of Renoir's.

It has already been noted that Spaak's script was offered to

30 Duvivier on Renoir's suggestion since Renoir considered that he had already done something similar with *Monsieur Lange* and did not want to copy himself.

The script, in fact echoes *Lange* in the most obvious ways. Though done in a similar mode it has none of *Lange's* sincerity, spirit or point. The story is well known, and there is no point in repeating it. But relative to that story as presented in *Lange*, its impoverishment is evident. It lacks the *chorality* which makes *Lange* the masterpiece it is. The element of a co-operative is linked in the film to individualist motives, or at least to a small group isolated from the 'evil world'. Independence and co-operation are achieved by chance (the lottery). Chance defeats obstacle after obstacle. Admittedly the film has a nice illustrative spirit: its workers are likeable and credible, their friendship moving (for example, the Spanish immigrant who arrives among them, another of those characters intended to suggest supranational working-class solidarity). But Spaak's capable and attentive script collapses under the weight of Duvivier's commercial demands and crude opportunist calculations. (It is, in this sense, sociologically representative.) It is well known that the film has two endings: the first optimistic⁵² for the people, for the working class suburbs; the second, pessimistic (solidarity is defeated either by fate or by personal intrigues, lovely dreams remain lovely dreams, unattainable ideals which cannot stand up to the hard facts of everyday life, like socialism, like peace . . .); this second one was made for release on the Champs Elysées and in the centre of Paris. The people are content – the demagogy of the optimistic ending a nod to the Front. The bourgeoisie is content – a nod to the right, petty bourgeois ideology is satisfied by the demonstration of the allegorical defeat of the Front. Duvivier makes a pile of money, but perhaps Duvivier was also sincere in his vacillation between Belleville and *les beaux quartiers*, convinced of his ability to save both the goat and the cabbages. (The gamble worked for a while: the left applauded the film in spite of the fact that his previous film, *La Bandera* (1935), opened with a dedication to Franco, who in the meantime had used mercenaries in Gilieth-Gabin mould to attack the Republic).

In the same year Carné made his debut with *Jenny*. The film is a melodramatic pastiche, over-rated at the time, in which Prévert, who wrote the script, made little effort except for certain secondary characters (Barrault as the character of 'The Dromedary' [a hunchback, underworld figure] is inimitable; and the fantastic Le Vigan, in the role of Albinos – in the original script he was called 'the Archbishop' – gives his best, shrewdly imitating the celebrated arms merchant and adventurer, Sir Basil Zaharoff – about whom Eisenstein had considered making a film) and for a few escapes from the smoky world of elegant cabaret to the suburban streets of Paris (the dramatic background of the Ourcq canal). The rest is melodrama of the worst kind. Carné's other projects (a

film on juvenile prisons, a love story in Belleville 'in the style of Charles Ray's *The Girl I Loved* (1922) but with a script by Utrillo') never came to fruition. The Front's censorship (in the eternal control of an imbecile, Edmond See) even tampered with *Jenny*.⁵³

But, as we have seen, it did not take much for a film to be judged progressive and 'Frontist'. *Jenny* is, moreover a first film, and the script is by Prévert. The film was a success even with the most demanding critics. In 1936 these critics considered that Benoit-Levy's *Hélène* (Helen, a chemistry student), based on an insignificant novel by Vicki Baum, was 'Frontist', because it was a 'courageous denunciation of the fate of young intellectuals';⁵⁴ that *Les Beaux Jours* 'The Bath of Happiness', by M. Allégret was 'Frontist' because it dealt with the sufferings of the student class,⁵⁵ that *Golem* was 'Frontist' because it turned 'a legend about witchcraft into a film about revolution';⁵⁶ that Deval's *Club des Femmes* (1936) was 'Frontist' because it demonstrated that riches 'do not put a man outside the social reality of our times'.⁵⁷

1937 was to open with a successful song by Ray Ventura: 'Tout va bien, madame la marquise'. It soon became a film.⁵⁸ With the *Internationale* and the *Marseillaise* it became the most popular song of the time, an index of an optimism turning insipid and rhetorical. In fact, it was the moment when things started to go wrong, seriously wrong.

VIII

Blum's non-intervention is perhaps the most decidedly equivocal and tragic act of his government. It immediately defines the limits of the experience and demonstrates all its weaknesses. Presented with a hypothetical guarantee against Nazism (an agreement with England [and Italy and Germany] which he knew to be a farce), Blum chose to maintain an uncertain alliance (with England) rather than a secure one (with Spain). Blum resolved the dilemma by a betrayal of the principle of proletarian, anti-fascist, republican solidarity which he had exalted hitherto. French intellectuals, however were not idle: resistance was organised, volunteers, writers, journalists, left for Spain, Malraux among them.

His film *L'Espoir*, made in 1937/1938, and first shown in 1939, just prior to the invasion of France, and then only at private screenings, must be included with *Toni* as a genuine precursor of neo-realism, and in particular of the work of Rossellini. But it appeared too late to have any effect or influence. Some other films were used immediately. Buñuel's name (*L'Âge d'Or*) reappears. He was directly involved, with Grémillon, in Spain, and produced for Grémillon, both before and after the outbreak of the civil war, some minor works – popularisations quickly made. Two of his films, *Madrid 1936* and *Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)*, were shown on a number of occasions in Paris.

Even before this there had been much talk about a Spanish film,

32 to be produced by the CNT (National Workers Confederation) and the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation), but *Julio Rojo y Negro* (directed by Mateo Santos) was unfortunately never made. In 1935, *Regards* published a long two-part article by Pierre Unik on *Las Hurdes*, three years after the film had been made. The film was received enthusiastically in Paris. It was presented as an indictment of those conditions which the Spanish Front wanted to destroy and Franco's supporters to restore. Released in 1936, the film was screened at many pro-Republican Spain demonstrations. The producer, Ramon Acin, was killed in battle a few months later. Juan Piqueras, the young critic who founded *Nuestro Cinema* and was active in the film society movement, was also killed. (One of these days his best articles should be re-published).⁵⁹

Madrid 1936 (also known as *España Leal en Armas*) is a powerful documentary which bears the mark of Buñuel though presented as a collectively edited work and shown in April at the height of the civil war. *Commune* wrote: 'Let us hope that we can soon see the film of justice victorious, *Spain '37*'.⁶⁰

The documentary had been edited in Paris according to Buñuel's instructions. Another documentary was circulating in Paris in 1937, *ABC de la Libertad*. It, too, appeared as an unsigned Collective work. Much later, Renoir wrote the commentary for the French version of Joris Iven's *The Spanish Earth* (1937) and Ernest Hemingway wrote and spoke the commentary for the American version. The French text was diluted and tampered with. Aragon, a great specialist in literary 'purges' then and later, had some sections removed, and 'adapted the text so that the theses and language did not conflict with the official Communist Party Line. Jean Renoir submitted, and executed his orders faithfully'.⁶¹ The French version was looked after and distributed by Ciné-Liberté.

The foreign policy and alliances of the Front were not its only debatable features. Internally, even in the area of cinema, the enthusiasm of 1936 had become a little more official and governmental, less spontaneous, more respectful of the theses and policies of the political parties involved.

The government's production initiatives seem to have been limited to a propaganda short for a national loan,⁶² or other similar minor projects. Meanwhile the censor was extremely active. There were frequent cuts and alterations; Ciné-Liberté tried in vain to reopen the Vigo case so that the ban on *Zéro de la Conduite* could be lifted. It never received a straight answer.⁶³ In addition, progressive and democratic films, like Archie Mayo's *The Black Legion*,⁶⁴ were prohibited. The banning of this film and of *La Gorçonne* – based on a Victor Margueritte novel in which 'nasty bourgeois' are depicted – provoked the most protest. Edmond See's circular stated that censorship certificates would be refused for films that showed disrespect for the army, that did not give due respect to foreign peoples, that might provoke diplomatic

incidents (that is: films that attacked Italian fascism and Nazism . . .) and for films that attacked national sentiment, gangster films that depicted armed robbery favourably, etc. The circular was issued at the end of 1937, but it was no more than the seal on an existing state of affairs. The government attempted to justify itself, lurching ridiculously between affirmations of liberation and increasingly ambiguous behaviour.

The position of the unions was also deteriorating. The promises of spring 1936 were quietly put aside. Finance for cultural activities was almost non-existent; the passion for nationalisation in this area was quickly forgotten. It is enough just to recall René Faure's reply to a *Cinémonde* questionnaire (April, 1936) on the SFIO's film programme: 'If one day our party holds complete political power, it will make the cinema a state institution. Because it is impossible for a government that wants to establish a new order to allow such a powerful means of propaganda to remain in the hands of groups that may have interests opposed to its own'.⁶⁵ The situation in the *Fédération du Spectacle* deteriorated to such an extent that the abandonment of the 1936 Programme and the interminable compromises with the state and producers provoked a spontaneous strike against the union's own leaders!⁶⁶

As regards the more or less autonomous left-wing organisations which backed a united front, the situation was still in flux, even though they were restrained by the necessity of not confronting problems in depth, and not attacking the Front government which they had helped to create. Their freedom of action was much the same as that of the Communist Party's. Their criticisms of Blum were becoming increasingly severe, and, in certain cases, 'destructive'. From time to time, *Ciné-Liberté* organised film shows and lectures. It enlarged its network of clubs and members (in the various sections of Paris, generally, the local headquarters was in a bistro), and published an unexceptional journal. But their film productions were few and increasingly lifeless: 'Pioneer camps in the USSR', reports on youth hostels, and similar inanities. All energy was concentrated on the preparation and production of a super-spectacle for the Front and the Nation, *La Marseillaise*, which was, naturally, going to be directed by Renoir. An unsigned reply to an interesting survey on youth and the cinema conducted by the *Cahiers de la jeunesse*,⁶⁷ a Communist magazine edited by Nizan, repeated the old slogans: contact between technicians and artists, between artists and the public, the possibility of a young independent cinema, the struggle against defeat. A Communist film tradition was born in this period, and it still exists today, even though it is hardly vigorous: the sweetened, populist, mild and 'social' films which deal with such significant problems as pensions or holiday camps, municipal administration or the beauty of France. Compared with its imitations, *La Vie est à Nous* can still be seen to be a unique masterpiece. It is sincere and genuine due

34 to the conjuncture of exceptional talents and the enthusiasm of the time. In the imitations, everything is false and constructed: the formulae are worse than questionable; they are insipid, for example, Le Chanois' *Les Temps des Cerises* (1937). The film was not made for Ciné-Liberté but for a company financed directly by the Party. It had little success, but it is worth remembering as an example of *toute une politique*. Set in 1895, it is the story of two men: a rich man and a poor man, born on the same day. The parallel narrative follows the poor man's adventures and the rich man's successes from birth to youth to old age. We lose sight of the rich man before the war, in which he did not fight, in order to concentrate on the worker, who, at the end of the war, meets up with his old friends from the front:

One of them, a talented decorator, has fallen into poverty, another, an engineer, has become a clerk, a third has been sacked from his factory, too old! It is the sad story of heart-rending old age: the old woman who is unable to get anyone to give her washing to do, the old man who has to beg, singing in order to live. He does not know how to sing (. . .) poor bloke! His hoarse voice singing 'Les Temps des Cerises' upsets us.⁶⁸

But, take heart, it is not a crude, pessimistic piece.

Old people are not alone. The Communist Party watches out for them. It demands the 'pension' in its demonstrations, tracts, and meetings to which thousands come running with hope in their hearts. We are watching an imposing gathering (. . .) and you can see for yourself that the people are not extras but are our dear parents and grandparents.

Jean Kress soothes us in the columns of *L'Avant-Garde*, always full of good sentiments when it is not a question of the Spanish anarchists or the 'counter-revolutionaries' in the Moscow trials.

A film that is probably of more interest, is *Visages de la France* if only because it was written by Paul Nizan in collaboration with André Wurmser and Jean Lurçat and directed by Andre Vigneau, with music by Honegger. It is a full (or medium?) length documentary. Why it was made tells us everything: a presentation to Russia for the 20th anniversary of October, a mirror of the glory and the reality of the French working people. Shot here and there with meagre resources, produced by a sort of company with evident Communist connections, the film was intended to be 'a kind of fresco, an honest portrait of many aspects of our country: landscapes, people at work, cultural riches, a brief history'. It is a shame that we do not have Nizan's own comments on the film, although we doubt, given his ideological rigidity during that period, that the film could be marked by any great originality. Lurçat's

remarks do, however, suggest a certain sincerity of vision.⁶⁹ One can judge on the basis of this significant anecdote: 35

Vigneau shot the miners leaving work in the Pas-de-Calais. By chance, he shot this scene: a worker at the exit, distributing tracts and subscription lists for the Spanish struggle. A miner comes out, still black, his gaze uncertain in the changed lights, his face tired. He accepts a tract mechanically, then reads the headline 'For the Spanish struggle', pulls out some money, and continues on his way reading the paper carefully.⁷⁰

But such moments of truth are probably lost in the 'historical vision' and behind the noise of the People's Choir singing the *Marseillaise*.

Le Chanois, who was very active, was to make another short film on Vaillant-Couturier just after his death (*La Vie d'un Homme*) and at the end of 1937 a documentary on Thorez, who had just given his masterpiece, *Fils du Peuple*, to the printer. The description of the day's filming in Thorez's house, in a study full of the complete works of 'Lenin and Anatole France'⁷¹ is a small gem of Communist journalism of the time.

IX

Chronologically, *La Marseillaise* (1938) comes after *La Grande Illusion*. It was released in 1938. The project and its preparation, however, date back to the beginning of 1937, and, in ill-defined form, to an even earlier date. It was intended to be 'the film of '37', made in the first instance as an official presentation for the Paris Exposition,⁷² an allegorical representation of the French revolutionary spirit. It was born as a film of the people, it was transformed into a film of a tottering coalition, full of consensus and nationalism, trying to please everyone.

The film was launched with a public subscription. Among the first subscribers were the numerous members of the newly formed CGT. A few months earlier Romain Rolland's vast fresco, *14 Juillet*, had been put on with state support, the first attempt at a state financed popular theatre. *La Marseillaise* obviously echoes the spirit of this spectacle, and it was born in its wake. The appeal spoke of a . . .

film for the people, made by the people. It will be the film of the French nation against a minority of exploiters, the film of the rights of man and of the citizen. For the first time the people itself will produce it, by means of a vast public subscription. Two francs from each producer. Two francs for each subscription. Two francs that will be subtracted from the price of the seat in the cinema when the film is shown. Subscribe!

Months and months of research for the script, months of work with extras donated by the CGT and with volunteers of all kinds,⁷³

36 dozens of actors, a cast of thousands, the support of the most important ministries. But *La Vie est à Nous* conceived as a small film for electoral propaganda, was released at a time of genuine enthusiasm and in the hope of great changes and this can be seen in the film. *La Marseillaise*, on the contrary, was made during a period of crisis for Blum's government. It was lost among the government's thousand troubles, fears and international problems. The working class, oppressed by opposing forces, in large part grouped (especially the young, the new arrivals) inside a severely Stalinist type of party, frightened by the war and bewitched by the slogans of a quietist, idiotic pacifism or of a growing, self-satisfied nationalism, turned in on itself after Clichy⁷⁴ and the calling into question of the victories of 1936. Capital had, on the other hand, raised its head. It was once again directing the game. The great fears of June and of the previous year had passed. In this morass of contradictions and of impotence, the film was born, a kind of many-sided excuse. It glorified the 1789 Revolution because, as Chardère wrote, it was 'unable to make the 1937 one'. A vision of the past was projected as a pretended mirror of the present. It was a politics of renunciation.

Renoir's basic conception of the film was to humanise the story and make it relevant. This he did in good faith and with conviction. He wrote: 'It would be impossible to make a film on the current political situation. Such a film would risk provoking polemics and would be unpopular with audiences that go to the cinema primarily for entertainment'; but he adds:

. . . the revolutionaries, the king, the Queen, and their court are not the only people in the film. There are representatives of all the social groups of the time that correspond in someway to social groupings today. There is only one class missing in *La Marseillaise*. It is the working class, which did not then exist as such.⁷⁵

La Marseillaise is a film financed by the working class, made with its money (from subscriptions and from the CGT), with a cast of unpaid workers, but which does not consider this class. Instead it is a barely adequate description of a people – done in accord with 'current' film conventions ('between Claire and Pagnol' wrote Chardère) – and a call for national sentiment against the wicked few (the émigrés). The court is not included among the wicked. In fact, Renoir concentrated on the court and did so with great affection and perspicacity: the agreeable hunter king and nobles are seen in their everyday reality, stripped of ceremonial pomp and the dust of history. These are the best parts of the film. This is due to Renoir's natural inclinations as well as to the Party, which, either through the CGT or through the scriptwriters and the production team (Le Chanois, for one, and the script was discussed more than once with the political leaders), wanted to present itself

as the national and patriotic party, faithful to tradition, open to collaboration. When, for example, one of the revolutionary soldiers says that 'not all priests are bad', it is because the Party was in dialogue with the Catholics. Or, when someone says, 'We want the patriotic ministers back in the government', the public thought of Auriol. And when they talk about 'the cost of living' – which the aristocrats forced up – we are confronted with a diluted version of the slogans about 'the two hundred families' . . . This updating of the Revolution is a sweetening, a castration. The film is the product of these contradictions and this approach: confused, tired, uncertain, good-natured, sometimes insipid. The film does have virtues (single sections, single characters) but these have little weight in the film as a whole.

The film had a gala premiere during the 1938 New Year's holiday: seven ministers, fifteen ex-ministers, twenty-five ambassadors, and various generals, academics, party secretaries, *le beau monde*. *La Marseillaise* represents, more than any other film, the weaknesses and equivocations of the Popular Front and the PCF's policy during those years. For Renoir, it was an important and profound experience. Up to that point, his ideas were similar to the Party's, and in this film, too, his effort and support was sincere. But with the Front's disintegration and with the failure of its ideology and of its policies, his development was to be parallel yet divergent. His analytic lucidity led him to *La Règle du Jeu*, in which his consciousness of a decaying situation finally becomes clear and in which he chooses to describe the precise world of the bourgeoisie, with whom he feels tied and to whom he belongs, though critical of it. His proletarian illusions ended with *La Marseillaise*.

While he was preparing *La Marseillaise*, Renoir quickly made *La Grande Illusion*. It is a very well-known film, in fact, too well known. Too much has been written about it. Certainly it is over-rated to the disadvantage of *La Règle du Jeu*. The only reason for returning to it here is to point out that a number of the important elements of Renoir's work during 1937 come from the ideology of that year. In *La Grande Illusion*, as in *La Marseillaise*, there is a certain sense of national unanimity: the characters played by Gabin, Fresnay and Dalio, come from a common French mould, but they are distinguished by their class differences. Likeable, as ever, they represent the best of their respective classes. Even if the 'grande illusion' alluded to by Renoir and Spaak is that of an old bourgeois belief that class differences can disappear in time of war (the admirable scene between Fresnay and von Stroheim), and that class solidarity cannot resist nationalism (the weaker scenes, those between Gabin and Dita Parlo, suggest that the contrary is true of the working class). But even this theme takes a secondary role beside the equal nobility of the three characters, who are all on the same moral level. As Bazin wrote: 'his moral relation to the

38 characters could be summarised in the motto: "Everyone has their own good reasons".⁷⁷

The film's second central element is its pacifism, honest but with a sentimental and populist foundation; it has the fault of drawing upon a sentimental memory of war which is idealised and without reference. And although it may be said that it is like the description of war in Barbusse and Remarque, it is like them only in its conclusion. Renoir's war is anything but brutal. Sometimes it is chivalrous, but is far from the horrible tragedy found in *Milestone*, *Losey*, *Trivas*, *Kubrick* or *Pabst*. The points of reference of these film makers are more narrow. Twenty years later the same vision became absurd, unacceptable: *Le Caporale Epinglé*, which is based on a similar sort of pacifism, was a kind of parody of *La Grande Illusion*. Renoir's 1937 message is full of enlightened common sense, but no more than that.

1937 is according to Brogan also 'the year of a real decline in the moral energy and faith of the French',⁷⁸ not only because of the internal crisis but also because of the Front's handling of international questions. 'Defend peace at any price' had become Blum's motto, and the defence of peace meant the sacrifice of Spain, the acceptance of Hitler's conquests, the odious betrayal of friendship with Czechoslovakia. The film is a part of this climate of excessive pacifism, and the weakness of the film's message is a result of this climate. The pacifism of 1937 is equivocal and renunciatory, so much so that it is really illusory. The hand extended in goodwill to Hitler's Germany even to exorcise 'at any price' the tempest from French soil, was to lead to the Munich farce, and later to Vichy. Renoir's sincerity and the nobility of his feelings is again beyond doubt, but again not sufficient to redeem his work.

X

The principal character of the French cinema at the time, the 'worker' played by Gabin, experienced a definite crisis in 1937. Prévert, its creator had overcome his initial enthusiasm, and from reactions that greeted his films (Renoir said that *Quai des Brumes* (1938) was 'counter-revolutionary') one would not have thought that the left considered him to be 'one of theirs'. The romantic, anarchic feeling of the Gabin character is an essential point in any critical discussion, a point which has so often been analysed,⁷⁹ that were it not so crucial there would be no reason to consider it again.

The point is (and one which is often deliberately disregarded because of a lax attitude to history) that the Gabin character was only developed via a number of rather uneven films, by several different directors and writers (Mac Orlan, Spaak, Duvivier, Renoir, Grémillon; but also Prévert – and behind the Albert-Préjan character in *Jenny* the outline [ie, of the Gabin character] is already recognisable); the character bears the fundamental traits which

Prévert [later] gave it in *Quai des Brumes* (1938). Romantic, anarchic, pre-destined, with tragedy written on his face, a total rebel who believes in nothing but love and, sometimes, in his 'mates', Gabin is not so much a Popular Front character (*La Belle Equipe* excepted) as one who represents the agony and the end of the Front, and the approach of war. In every film, even the less well-known ones (like Grémillon's *Gueule d'Amour*), he wears a metaphysical cap of desperation and defeat. The 'good-murderer-hero beaten by the cowardly and the powerful' finds no escape or solution in a totally corrupt world which is controlled by the bourgeoisie, the church and the military. Even love, the only apparent road to salvation, escapes him in every film, right up to the final tragic solution which occurs in every case.

La Bête Humaine is also impregnated with this pessimistic romanticism, even though in this case its origin seems to be Zola's *fin-de-siècle* positivism. In an excellent comparison of the film and the novel, Trompeo acutely observes how much of this romanticism *malgré soi* there is in both Renoir and Zola.⁸⁰

One cannot say that Gabin directly represents the spirit of the working class of 1937 and 1938; but one notices in the Prévert-Carné films undeniable fatigue and demoralisation – signs of the crisis that dominated the workers in those years. Once the illusion of a collective, social solution and the hope of establishing a socialist society had disappeared, some people joined up with a Stalinist bureaucratic party and others isolated themselves in an 'each man for himself' attitude, with tragic results. The CGT, which had had an exceptionally huge influx of membership in 1936, had an equally vast loss of membership in 1937. The disgust of the Gabin character is justified. His reactions are perhaps not typical, but they express the disorientation of an entire class. Renoir, like Prévert, ended up with an anarchic, desperately individualist vision of the worker. There is no more hope, because no one knows who to blame. No one has the strength to start again from the beginning and rebuild. From *Quai des Brumes* to *Hotel du Nord* (1938), to the even more despairing films, *La Bête Humaine* (1934) and *Le Jour se Lève* (1939), there is a trail of enormous hopes completely exhausted by compromise and manoeuvring, fear and treachery, dragging behind it the collapse of an entire generation and its make-or-break political experiment.

XI

It is useful to trace briefly the history of the attacks on the Front, which are echoed more or less directly in films of the period. These help us to understand the make-up of the opposition and perhaps some of the reasons for the Front's weakness.

The French bourgeoisie was never inactive in these years. 1936 had frightened it a bit, and during that year its activity was limited. It was in a defensive posture (for two or three months) but prior

40 to that, and particularly after, it managed to use all its weapons. Its collaborationist, colonialist, retrograde spirit can be seen in a long series of films, even though to some extent masked, depending on the case. Obviously patriotism absorbed most of its energy; and for this it had famous directors who had their moments of genius, like Gance – who subsequently exalted Pétain and De Gaulle – and L'Herbier, who was a well-known sympathiser with Colonel La Rocque's Croix-de-Feu, as well as hacks like Périer, Mathot, Choux, Bernard and so on. The occasional support of well-known directors like Pagnol, Guitry and Duvivier should not be forgotten. By opting for pure 'entertainment' cinema and apolitical, supposedly personal, experiments they made increasingly ambiguous films, which were often politically suspect. For example, there were whole series of films about colonial adventures (*La Piste du Sud* (1938), *Les Sentinelles de l'Empire* (1939), *Soeurs d'Armes* (1937), etc) which were made regularly even during the Front's moments of triumph – not that the Front's colonial policies will be well remembered; on the contrary. Another current was insincerely patriotic and war-mongering (L'Herbier's *La Porte du Large*, which was made with the help of the Front's naval ministry . . . Mathot's *Le Revolté* (1938), dedicated 'à la grandeur de la Marine de Guerre française, à la gloire de ses équipages' in 1938 . . .). Another chose to depict an ideal world without class struggle: Jean Choux' *Paris* (1937) where 'the situation of the workers is seen without class struggle and without class hatred' and the French people 'respect traditional values and authority, are loyal to their arduous tasks, and opposed to compromising alliances because they want to have clear consciences, a people who find happiness in paternal love and in respect for family traditions',⁸¹ and *L'Argent* in which the class struggle only provokes disasters. In addition, there was a proliferation of spy films, like those of Pabst and L'Herbier, which were beautifully mocked in a 'comic scenario' by Prévert.⁸²

Few clearly fascist propaganda films are known. Louis Chavance listed some in an article of the period⁸³: *Croisière sur le Campara*, with the Count of Paris in person; *Versailles*, the Count again giving a speech; a propaganda film made by the Agrarian Party; a documentary on the Croix-de-feu's 'alleged social work'; *Passeurs d'Homme* (1937) and *Amis . . . Comme Autrefois*, the latter scripted by Joseph Kessel (with Mac Orlan who attended every pro-Franco rally), which made use of a story about war veterans to preach fascism openly. In *Jérôme Perreau*, a farce set in the eighteenth century, Milton, the comic, asks, 'What does France need?' and replies with a song: 'Il lui faut un chef, ôgué. Ill lui faut un chef!' ('It needs a leader – keep a look out – it needs a leader!'). In the last scene there is a prediction for 1938 (the film was made in 1936): 'In 1938 there will be no more politics in France' . . .

Co-productions were the producers' daily bread, and even honest

and undoubtedly left-wing directors (like Grémillon) worked for Tobis (*Gueule d'Amour*) just after returning from Spain . . . 41

La Grande Illusion is not 1937's only pacifist film. Rather, one could say, it was the first of a series. In 1937 and 1938 even right-wing films became pacifist. Gance utilised the occasion to resurrect his old film *J'accuse* (1919) once again. But the most terrifyingly striking documents of the period are Jean Choux's *Paix sur le Rhin* (1938) and an official documentary on the 20th anniversary of the armistice (November 1938). The first of these is set in Alsace: an old, local pro-French man does not want his daughter to marry a German. Naturally it all ends happily. Especially since another character, a young sculptor, uses the old man's daughter as the model for an enormous peace monument: 'She (Alsace) will take in her arms, on the right and the left, the two brothers, the German soldier and the French soldier'. The projected monument and the caption, 'Will we ever see a monument like this?', end the film. E. Buhoit and J. Lordier made the documentary. It is an invitation to peace with Germany and an exaltation of Munich. In the stormy world, France and Germany sign a treaty, the first step towards world peace. An old section of the film has Briand thundering, 'Away with the cannons! Away with the machine-guns! Away with the war that brings fears to mothers' eyes!'⁸⁴ In 1938, Wiene, with *Ultimatum*, recalled the days just before the start of the 1914-18 war.

France resigned. Hope collapsed. The great revolutionary wave ended up as a soap bubble with a series of defeats provoked by a policy of compromise and odious, social-democratic 'good sense', and worse. Everyone is responsible for this. The ground was prepared for Vichy, for the 'phoney war', and for collaboration. At the summit of his art, Renoir gave us the best premonition of the catastrophe: *La Règle du Jeu*.

XII

What exactly is La Règle du Jeu?

An exact description of the bourgeoisie of our time. I want to show that there is a rule for every game and if you do not respect it you lose.⁸⁵

And thirteen years later:

When I made *La Règle du Jeu* I knew where I was going. I knew the evil that was corroding our contemporaries. This does not mean that I knew how to give a clear idea of this evil in my film. But my instinct guided me. The consciousness of the danger provided me with the situations and the answers, and my comrades were like me. We were very uneasy.

1938 was not an easy year; 1939 even less so. The Spanish tragedy, Munich, Czechoslovakia, the Moscow purges and the death-blows

42 they gave the left; later the Stalin-Ribbentrop agreement, the disintegration of the Front and the return of Daladier, one after the other, gradually becoming more and more serious, among the thousands of major and minor compromises and betrayals. All of this is present and legible in *La Règle du Jeu*. This perfect, sublime film, misunderstood for so long and, even with the dazzling complete version now available, still today greeted with mistrust, and a kind of fear. It is not only the most perfectly constructed and best balanced of Renoir's films, it is also the film in which his craft achieves total command of the cinematic art and the level of genius. It is also his most authentically personal film, the richest in meaning. Saved from the scepticism of defeat and disillusion by a lucid self-consciousness, and an awareness of his art and his own role, Renoir freed himself from every equivocation or diversion. He found once again his most genuine terrain. It is clear that proletarian positions were of only relative interest to him. His bourgeois roots, his belonging to a bourgeois tradition, were crystal-clear to him, and it is on these things that he acts. Although a member of a disintegrating class, he has the advantage of lucidity and a certain detachment over this class, while being part of it.

Within and without, at the same time participant and judge, he observes, unblinkered, 'the rules of the game' of the society to which he belongs. He studies it, dismantles it, explains it. In a closed and isolated world (a château in Sologne) characters out of Musset, Marivaux and Beaumarchais appear – though updated. The macabre and grotesque ballet, described with perfect notation and construction, using all the elements of the *arte della commedia*, is both compassionate and harsh, nonchalant, witty and silly, amoral and distant. It is a tragedy which is also a game, a game to hide and in which to hide oneself, because reality would be too squalid and harsh to be accepted and would cause a break of incalculable consequences. Every game requires a loser and every tragedy a scapegoat. Being both a participant and compassionate he will be the only person who takes everything in and understand it, without the strength to detach himself. The same game repeats itself, on another level, among the servants, and intrudes into the world of their 'superiors' at the same moment of tragedy, foretold by the wonderful hunt sequence, affects them all. The heap of game and the agony of the animals, and later, the innocent death of the chorus-character pre-figure other slaughters, other scapegoats . . .

If Beaumarchais announced the coming of the Revolution, Renoir did the same for the Second World War. Decisively opting for his world, not so much out of sympathy or joy but because he has by now realised how tentative and fragile invading another world is, and how deeply his roots are embedded in his own world, Renoir has reached the summit of his development. This is precisely the reason that his film is the first and the last which he made in total

liberty, as producer as well as director, and with a group of faithful friends. It was the first subject whose choice was not affected by any other factors (producers' suggestions, the refusal of other directors, interference from backers) except his own ability and inspiration. A unique and inimitable work, *La Règle du Jeu* is not only a masterpiece, but also, without any doubt, the most symptomatic example of the crisis of the twentieth century, even though done in the form of a ballet.

Renoir did not give us an analysis of the working class's dismay and fatigue in 1939, nor could he. *La Bête Humaine* is full of symptoms of this dismay, as are the films of Carné/Prévert. But these visions are always voluntarist and partial. They are populist or romantic or anarchic or petit-bourgeois, and often a curious mixture of all of these.

If we want an overall 'class' assessment of the cinema in this period we must look to the only existing example, *Contre le Courant* (1930), a documentary made by Pivert's Parti Socialiste des Ouvriers et Paysans, which unfortunately I have not seen. However, the few comments Daniel Guérin makes about it in his book can give us a clear idea of the spirit in which it was made. The text was written by Pivert. His position is well known — often ambiguous because of his *attentisme* and loyalty to Blum or because of a certain pacifism which was not always based on a serious analysis of the international situation. The film covers the whole period of the Front, from 1934 to 1938, and does not stint on either criticism or self-criticism. A single sentence from the text, which refers to June 1936, seems to me relevant to the whole experience: 'The proletarian revolution was within our reach: we were not able to grasp hold of it'.⁸⁶ His minority group within the SFIO did not know how to seize it. The SFIO itself did not want to seize it, nor, out of loyalty to Moscow and its defensive posture, did the Communist Party. The great hope was over. It was to be born again in the Resistance, but that was different and not new because it was stimulated by a reaction to occupation, by that nationalism which was the most acceptable basis of the Front's unity and which in 1939 still, even in the worse moments, had its most convinced supporter in the Communist Party.

XIII

It is strange that in such a terrible year as 1939 more than one director wanted to make a film on children (many years after *La Maternelle* and *La Guerre des Gosses*). A film on children usually, or at least in the case of these directors, means hope, faith in the future, and candour — a spirit totally alien to even a mediated reality in 1939, a year with no prospects except disaster, and particularly tragic for children . . . Clair, nevertheless, was preparing *Air Pur* (1939). Shooting was interrupted by the outbreak of war. Lo Duca wrote in 1940: 'The almost ritual innocence of his

44 characters, which is found in both the good and the bad ones, is the dominant motif of his work. This innocence, this 'angelism' led of necessity to *Air Pur*.⁸⁷ The Carné/Prévert duo, which had tried to float a much tougher project on juvenile prisons some years before, was preparing *Ecole Communale*. . . . And for *Ciné-Liberté*, which in its after-life was even more closely linked to the PCF and abandoned by its most important supporters, Daquin was preparing *Nous les Gosses* (1941), the only one of these films that was even completed, albeit during the occupation. Set in the *banlieu*, it is the story of a group of boys who have caused some damage and who have to find the money to pay for it. It is a pleasant, gentle, and optimistic story. The fact that it was possible to finish it during the occupation proves the limits of its 'social' significance. The same is true of *Le Ciel est à Vous* (1944), my great liking for the film notwithstanding. *La Vie est à Nous*, *Le Ciel est à Vous*, the similarity of the titles is striking. And what could be more 'Frontist' than this film, dedicated to popular aviation, giving to the people access to leisure and sport, even in the very ways which had been most confined to the upper classes up till then? The film should have been made in 1936 to illustrate the promises of aviation for all made by the minister, Pierre Cot. In fact it was made in 1944, and the Nazi censor found nothing objectionable in it. The public and, even more, the critics saw it quite correctly as a film exalting the French spirit and ability. It was that, but it is obvious that this exaltation of a progressive, petit-bourgeois world could not annoy anyone, even though consoling the French with its recognition of their national virtues. Sadoul spoke of it in a clandestine paper:

In Zola's *Débauche*, we love the good petit-bourgeois from Sedan who is caught in the battle, fights soberly and, with our soldiers, saves our honour. Grémillon's heroes manage to attack with anything and everything. This is the image of French heroism, the naked child with no other defence than a bit of leather and stone. Love of country throbs in these simple images.⁸⁸

The film can still be read in this way, but out of its time and its place the film seems to us to be overrated and limited.

After the war was over, however, — too late yet again — Grémillon did make a film that is frankly linked to the Popular Front, a film that is full of its myths and its hopes, *Lumière d'Été* (1952). It is a gem of fascinating conventions and motifs, precisely because the conventions are liberated by the masked grace of characters from a new *commedia dell'arte* moving against the background of a musty château, a hotel and a construction site for a dam in Haute-Provence. The Sadian aristocrat, his mistress, the artist who wanders through scene after scene muttering 'how boring, how boring!', the girl in love and unsure, the young, fearless and committed engineer are all masks which take part in a 'class ballet'

not entirely dissimilar to Renoir's *La Règle* with a touch of caricature and great effect provided by their creators (Grémillon and Prévert). Grémillon and Prévert did not hesitate to end the film with a masked ball which moves from the château to the construction site. Each of the characters wears a suitable mask: the painter-Hamlet who affirms that 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark', the aristocratic-Des Grieux, the girl-Manon . . . and it all ends with a settling of accounts set against a lurid and tragic dawn, an appointment with destiny which, this time, takes place on a construction site among men working in the early morning light. The bad one dies, and the girl joins with the blond engineer and the workers to walk towards the sunrise.

Today this ethereal and delightful film seems to be a schematic compendium of an epoch and of an attitude seen through the eyes of memory. It should be seen and appreciated in this light, without giving it any extreme sociological tint. Is not its vision of a symbolic union between the middle classes and the proletariat one of the Front's best remembered legacies and one of the rallying points to which the left most often refers?

When the war was over films like Daquin's *Le Point du Jour* (1949) or Prévert's and Lotar's *Aubervilliers* (1947) tried to resurrect (as, in another way, Carné tried to do with the artificial continuation of 'poetic realism') the tone and the ideology of the past as if the war had been only a temporary parenthesis. They are obviously isolated and anachronistic. Much of their spirit, nevertheless, was to survive in the films of Communist directors whose perspectives and formulae seem unchanged (Le Chanois' films, for example, or certain documentaries like Daquin's recent *Gennevilliers* . . .), confirmations of the fossilisation of the Party based on the ideology of the 7th Congress. But in the context of the contemporary French cinema, with Aragon exalting Godard, it is an insignificant survival.

No film tried to present an overall assessment of the period. But Grémillon at least made an effort in that direction. He was shy and ill-adapted to the struggle of speculators and rivalries which dominate the film world, and the French film world in particular, and his most interesting projects were never filmed. With rare exceptions, he made films of little or no value. He was not able to make *1848*, a film about the first urban proletarian revolution in France, or *The Massacre of the Innocents*, his most ambitious project. It was to have been a love story between a male French worker and a Czech Communist woman in three episodes, with different settings: the Spanish Civil War, France at the time of Munich, the concentration camps and the post-war period. The French and Spanish parts were not to have been visions of glorious times but of defeat. It is unlikely that Grémillon would have been able to provide the definitive film on the period. His analysis and vision of the history of that period would probably have had much

46 of the sentimentalism which permeates *Le Ciel est à Vous* as well as *Lumière d'Été*. But it would certainly have been a sincere and impassioned work, simple and devoid of any grandiloquence, as was his life.

Whereas, Renoir, the principal subject of this study and the central character of the French cinema for half a century, was invited to Italy by Mussolini's son in 1940. This is the same Renoir who wrote: 'I believe myself to be a member of this nation and I feel solidarity with the national community. I am absolutely certain that I would be incapable of producing a decent film outside this national community'.⁸⁹ His subsequent evolution is well known: he still had some good films in him, even if they were not masterpieces, but they increasingly reflected his absorption in an increasingly sceptical and distant, if not actually reactionary, ideology. But is this not perhaps the fate of most of the survivors of his generation, the generation of 'commitment', the generation of 1936?

Notes

1. Interview with Pierre Philippe, in *Cinéma 61*, no 60. I have chosen to limit this article to a critical-historical account. There are many articles and studies on the cinema during the Popular Front (G. Sadoul, in *Il cinema e l'uomo moderno*, edited by Umberto Barbaro, Rome, 1950; M. Mida, in *Il Politecnico*, October 20, 1945; O. Campassi, *Dieci anni di cinema francese*, 2 volumes, Milan 1948 etc, etc) and an infinite number of texts on Renoir, Carné, Prévert, Clair, Feyder . . . Without neglecting these sources, I decided to see the films again and to muster documentation on the period so as better to set the films in the context of the time and write something original: particularly as I do not, for the most part, share the views expressed in these studies, which often rigidly respect the critical orthodoxy of the French or Italian Communist Party at the time they were written, or – as with the most recent studies – follow the Front's criteria for criticism, and are decidedly influenced by Lukacs's *The Destruction of Reason*, not his best work in my view. This article has two limitations. I have looked at the films solely from the point of view of their relationship with the Popular Front, and the account therefore does not, for example, provide the full analysis demanded by the various aspects of Renoir's work. It also omits a general discussion of the ideology of the Popular Front, a subject I do however intend to return to after some more specialised studies of the period.
2. The anti-fascist tradition (*Il Politecnico*, for example) was precisely restricted to the French Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War, and the New Deal (. . .). It is no accident that the first history of the Spanish war to be published in Italy appeared twenty years after the fall of fascism'. Franco Fortini, *Verifica dei Poteri*, Milan, 1965, p115). What is true for Spain is just as true in France for the Popular Front.
3. George Lefranc, *Histoire du Front Populaire*, Paris, 1965. Lefranc was, at the time, in the SFIO (see note [61]), where he was concerned with union affairs. He subsequently became involved with the Vichy government. His book is a documented account of the years from 1934 to 1938, but it provides no interpretation whatsoever. Letting

the facts speak for themselves is, in a period as confused as this, unsatisfactory and pointless.

4. See for example, Aldo Garosci, *Storia della Francia moderna*, Turin, 1946. The most complete history of the Third Republic that has appeared to date is still Jacques Chastenet's seven-volume work, published in Paris between 1952 and 1963. Also see Dennis Brogan's *The Development of Modern France 1870-1939*, London, 1940.
5. J. T. Marcus, *French Socialism in the Crisis Years (1933-1936)*, New York, 1958; David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals (1914-1960)*, London, 1955. There are a number of official and unofficial histories of the French Communist Party. See for example, Robert Paris, 'Il Partito Comunista Francese, Storia e Storiografia', *Quaderni Piacentini*, no 22, March-April 1965.
6. I shall, nevertheless, have occasion to quote from the following works: D. Guérin, *Front Populaire, Révolution Manquée*, Paris, 1963; L. Bodin and J. Touchard, *Front Populaire 1936*, Paris, 1961; Plumyère and Laserra, *Les Fascimes Français*, Paris, 1963; G. Danas and M. Gibelin, *Juin 36*, Paris, 1952; and, obviously, the writings of Blum, Thorez, Paul-Boncour, etc, etc . . .
7. G. Amendola, 'Insegnamenti del VII Congresso dell'I.C. (Rileggendo Dimitrov)', in *Critica Marxista*, no 4, July-August, 1965. This issue is largely devoted to a 'discussion of the politics of popular and national fronts'. It also contains an article by J. M. Vincent on French social democracy. For a solid refutation, see Sergio Bologna, 'Classe e capitale in Francia dal Fronte Popolare a Vichy', in *Classe operaia*, no 4/5, 1965.
8. G. Dimitrov, 'The anti-fascist front' in *Selected Works*, Sofia 1967, vol I.
9. *Le Monde*, November 30, 1965, p2.
10. *Les Temps Modernes*, 1955, no 112-113.
11. J. Berlioz, 'Une leçon de l'expérience du Front Populaire', in *Cahiers du Communisme*, January, 1948, quoted in Bodin and Touchard, *Op. cit.* Also see the official study: Jacques Chambaz, *Le Front Populaire pour le pain, la liberté et la paix*, Paris, 1961, and Jacques Duclos' preface in the same volume.
12. *La Revue Socialiste*, June, 1956.
13. Michael Gorel, in *Cinémonde*, 8 February 1934. To be precise, he spoke of 'poetic and contemporary realism'. Marcel Aymé wrote the screenplay.
14. M. Carné, 'Quand le cinéma descendra dans la rue?' in *Cinémonde*, no 85, 1930. The appeal is clearly defined: 'To describe the simple life of the people to render the atmosphere of its labouring humanity, is that not better than describing the murky, overheated dance halls, the unreal nobility, and the all too familiar scenes of night life?' In his first feature length film, *Jenny*, Carné has it both ways, alternating the dance hall with the street.
15. Barthélémy Amengual, *René Clair*, Paris, 1963. See also René Clair, *A Nous la Liberté*, L'Avant Scène no 99, Paris 1968, also in Italian, script edited by R. May, *Bianco e Nero*, Rome, 1939, and in English with Entr'Acte, Lorrimer Scripts, London, 1970.
16. R. Crevel and P. Eluard, *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no 4, December 1931, in reference to the surrealist, Albert Valentin, who was involved in the making of the film. Later he was to become a well-known script-writer.
17. Juan Piqueras mentions this, in *Nuestro Cinema*, nos 8-9, January-February 1933.
18. One of the most ardent supporters of Chaplin's film was Robert Brasillach, the extreme right-wing poet and film critic whose support

for Franco, Hitler, and Vichy earned him a justified death sentence when France was liberated. François Vinneuil wrote in *L'Action Française* (April, 1936) that the film was, 'the satire of a society enslaved by materialism, of which Soviet Russia represents the barbarous apogee'. For Sadoul, not unnaturally, it was 'a work that belongs under the red flag' (*Commune*, no 114, 19 March, 1936). P. Baldelli, 'Fabbrica e cinema', in *Il Nuovo Spettatore Cinematografico*, no 29, April 1964, provides an ideological analysis of the film's content.

19. Grandjean, *Le Dernier Milliardaire*, in *Commune*, no 16, December, 1934.
20. I intend to present a study of the French political and popular theatre of the 1930s, and particularly of Prévert and the October Group, in a future number of *Giovane Critica*.
21. This is the central passage:

The unity of the working class has not yet been realised. It must be achieved immediately. We call upon all workers, whether organised or not, to block the road to fascism with the cry

UNITY OF ACTION

Achievement of this unity, which the workers want and the parties propose, is necessary, urgent and indispensable, in the *broad spirit of co-operation* that the gravity of the hour demands. (G. Lefranc. *op cit*, p430).

22. It is interesting to look at some of the more delirious examples. Jeanson, took Chiappe as his target and gave him no peace, attacking him week after week in whatever paper would give him access to its columns (in particular *Le Canard Enchaîné* and *La Flèche*). Two titles: 'Chiappe ou le flic errant' (28 March, 1936); 'Quand M. Chiappe dit "Bout-de-Mégot", dit "Bas-du-Chiappe", dit "Moins-d'un-mètre", dit "Talon-de-Chèque", dit "Al Chiappone" devient chef de bande' (25 April, 1936) . . .
23. Two letters from Pagnol and Renoir, published on the 2nd of March in *Cinématographie Française*, make clear the director's independence and his total responsibility for the film. In addition, at about the same time, Pagnol launched his new series of shorts and feature films (there was at the time a rebirth of the unprogrammed sketch, a return to the farce-finale) including *Marseille*, directed by J. Monti and J. Margueritte. Tino Rossi, as one of Marseille's most noted character actors, figured in his usual role in the film. Two such diverse conceptions of cinema could not be fused, and the association of Pagnol and Renoir ended after this one joint move despite their agreement on commercial and practical matters. Shorts and feature films were often run together . . . (*abbinati*)
24. P-F A, in *Regards*, 28 February, 1935.
25. See in D. Guérin, *op cit*, p126.
- 25a. B. Chardère, *Jean Renoir*, Lyons, 1963, p166.
26. The co-operative is the meaning, the centre, the message of the film. Particularly this section of dialogue: 'Who paid for the birth of Estelle's child?' 'The co-op'. 'Who paid for Charles' convalescence?' 'The co-op'.
27. It would be worthwhile to analyse in depth and at length the respective contributions of Renoir and Prévert to the film's success, 'the shaded fluidity, the lack of rough edges and points' that came from Renoir, and 'the acidity, the virulence of Prévert's imagination' (Roger Leenhardt, *Esprit*, 1 March, 1936), but I think it is of more interest to provide some information about Prévert's activity

during that period. After *L'Affaire* was banned by the censor, Prévert collaborated on at least half a dozen films which have been forgotten (except for Autant-Lara's *Ciboulette* and *L'Oiseau Rare*), but his most concentrated activity was with the October Group from 1932 to 1936, when the Group disappeared after a long and agonising financial decline (the Party became more recalcitrant that year: aggressivity was all right in the period prior to the formation of the Front, but afterwards attacks had to be more moderate, more innocuous . . .). From the text of *Vive la Presse* (with its war chorus which begins 'Attention, camarades, attention - Mourir pour la partie, c'est mourir pour Renault - Pour Renault, pour le Pape, pour Chiappe - Pour les marchands de viandes - Pour les marchands de canons . . .') to that of *Le Tableau des Merveilles*, with the famous song, 'Marche ou crève', Prévert made an outstanding contribution to the revival of the theatre and to the spread of revolutionary methods and ideas. (In 1933 the Group went to Moscow where they met the Meyerhold group. Prévert undoubtedly met Piscator and perhaps also Brecht whose *Threepenny Opera* was known to the Group, if only through the film. And Lotte Eisner spoke then of Brecht as 'a German Prévert' . . .) To call Prévert, on the basis of his second period of activity, the period of his 'black' songs and his collaboration with Carné, a 'clown of the bourgeoisie' is to neglect this first phase of his activity. On Prévert and the October Group see in B. Chardère, 'J. P. et le Groupe Octobre', in *Jacques Prévert, Premier Plan*, no 14, Lyons, 1962.

28. J. Prévert, 'Maisons de redressement', in *La Flèche*, 3 October, 1936. It is significant that by October Prévert was already writing for Bergery's paper and not in a Communist paper. Bergery was only a half-hearted supporter of the Front, and subsequently of Vichy. He was the accredited defender of the middle classes within the Front. This extraordinary article was to give birth to a song for Marianne Oswald and a script (possibly the one Carné mentions in *Ciné-Liberté*, no 5, 1 November 1936) which was blocked by the Front's censor, and never filmed.
29. D. Guérin, *op cit*, and the article by L. Chavance, 'Le cinéma au service du Front Populaire', in *La Flèche*, 27 June, 1936. There were apparently no similar radical initiatives. Those of the right are limited and of little interest. We shall have cause to refer to them later.
30. M. H., 'Qu'est-ce que Ciné-Liberté?', *La Flèche*, 23 March, 1936. L. Chavance, *art cit*; G. Sadoul, in *Regards*, 26 March, 1936. Ciné-Liberté published an eight-page, large format newspaper. Renoir, Jeanson, Moussinac, Aveline and Cheronnet were on the editorial committee. Since only two of its members belonged to the Party, its composition can be described as 'Frontist'. Renoir was the focal point of the project, its leading light, and the mediator among the various points of view. Since he has avoided any mention of this period in his post-war interviews, and there are no exhaustive studies of what actually happened; since not even Sadoul, who was not in any case a very direct participant, has discussed it except in passing and since, finally, no complete set of the newspaper has been found (the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has only one issue), this article is the first on the subject. Many inferences are, therefore, not as documented as they should be, although I do not believe I am offering incorrect information or hurried conclusions. Among the various Ciné-Liberté sponsored activities during December 1936 and January 1937 were a series of lectures

on censorship (Jeanson, Spaak, Godard), on technical problems, and on actors (Modot, Duvivier, Lefevre) given at the Maison de la Culture. There was also a public discussion between Renoir and Jeanson on the subject 'how to make a film'; the text of it was published in *Commune*, no 35, July 1936 and in *Cinéma*, no 171-72, 1943. Ciné-Liberté eventually had more than 20,000 members.

31. See *La Flèche*, 25 March, 1935.

32. *Regards* and *L'Humanité* referred to it regularly during 1935.

33. Statement of Ciné-Liberté in *Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse* (editor: Paul Nizan), number 4, 15 November, 1937.

34. (Editorial Note: See the letter from Claude Beylie to Positif in Positif no 115, April 1970. Beylie points out that a number of credits in the original article are left out, and which we have added. He also refers to the original script published in *L'Avant Scène* no 99. For the most part the Beylie letter to Positif refers only to an extract from the Fofi article and most of the errors it points to are not attributable to Fofi.)

La Vie est à Nous; director: Jean Renoir; script: Renoir, J. B. Brunius, Pierre Unik, Becker, A. Zwobada; script supervision: P. Vaillant-Couturier; assistant directors (and directors of certain sequences): Unik, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Le Chanois Maurice Lime; camera: Bourgoïn, Dourinoa, Isnard, Claude Renoir; cast: Gaston Modot, Julien Bertheau, Jean Dasté, Sylvain Itkine, Nadia Sibirskaja, Roger Blin, J. B. Brunius, Madeleine Sologne, Marcel Duhamel, Lorris, O'Brady, Becker, Max Dalban, Eddy Debray, Georges Spanelly, Ferdinand Bercher, Claire Gerard, Le Chanois, Jean Renoir, etc; and Thorez, Duclos, Cachin; length: about 80 minutes. Ciné-Liberté did not exist when the film was started. The film was produced by the Communist Party. It was subsequently distributed by Ciné-Liberté, in spite of the fact that it had been banned by the censor and was shown in local party sections, cultural centres, film societies, etc. The first showing, which was a press show, was at the Pantheon cinema on the 7th of April 1936. Thorez and Cachin introduced the film. The elections took place on the 26th of the same month, so the film could not have had many showings before the elections. Although many members of the October Group worked on the film (Brunius, Itkine, Duhamel, Fabien Lorris, Le Chanois, Blin, Dasté, O'Brady, etc), Prévert did not. Why? One can only suppose that his break with the Party began at that time with the crisis of the group and that either Prévert did not want to work on the film or he was not asked to work on it. It should also be noted that most of the people who worked on the film were not members of the Party.

After that period the film was shown only rarely. Renoir is ashamed of it and would prefer that it be forgotten. The French Cinémathèque does not have a copy. The only remaining copy of the film is held by the French Communist Party.

35. In *URCI Informations*, Toulouse, undated, but circa 1952.

36. Reviewing *Le Crime* in *Esprit* (1 March 1936), Roger Leenhardt writes, referring to the film's anti-clericalism:

For those who will be displeased by this aspect, a little anecdote to end. It seems that Renoir is now directing a film that is clearly Communist in inspiration (style 1936). The Party's first condition, however, was this: no attacks against priests and the military. I pass this anecdote on for whatever it is worth.

It is obviously worth something, since there are, effectively, no references to priests and the military in the film, and this is not one

of its least serious defects. It indirectly indicates some of the reasons (his or the Party's) for Prévert's non-participation in the film.

37. Sections of the script have been published in: B. Chardère, *Jean Renoir, op cit.*
38. Brunius had studied Ruttmann's *Melodie der Welt* at length, as he recalls in his book, *En Marge du Cinéma français*, Paris, 1954 (where he mentions that he edited the film's first two reels for Renoir). He was to return to these experiments in his 1937 documentary, *Records 37*, which I have not seen. See also J. B. Brunius, 'Il film sperimentale in Francia', in *Nascita del Cinema*, Milan, 1961.
39. For an account of the period, see G. Danas and M. Gibelin, *op cit.*
40. Léon Blum, quoted in M. Ribert, *Le Procès de Riom*, Paris, 1945. For a judgment on the Socialist and Communist policies, see Trotsky's *Whither France?* and the shorter and excellent 'La lutte décisive' (in *Ecrits 1928-40*) which discusses the very month in question.
41. Sadoul wrote about it in *Regards*, 27 August 1936.

We see workers preparing makeshift beds on big transmission belts, on car seats, at the foot of a machine, on chairs in large department stores and even under a tent set up in a factory yard. We see the immobile machines and the slanderous wall slogans accusing the very rare strikebreakers (. . .). We are taking part in a huge festival, dances, demonstrations, musical shows in the factories etc.

What lesson does old Sadoul gather from all of this? 'It is an extremely alive documentation of the folklore of strikes'. There follows a long dissertation on the new urban folklore, contrasted with that of the peasants, in a polemic against bourgeois and reactionary ethnologists!

42. See the producers' and exhibitors' journals for June and the months following, particularly *La Cinématographie Française*, and *L'Action cinématographique*.
43. P. A. Harle, in *La Cinématographie Française*, 6 June, 1936.
44. Co-production with three fascist states, Italy, Germany and Hungary, was a weapon available to the producers at that time, and they knew how to use it. Their general sympathy for the extreme right and their blissful admiration of Goebbels were already evident. The enthusiastic participation of the French film organisations at the film congress held in Berlin in 1935 was an example of this attitude. Goebbels's speech on the State and the cinema was often remembered in the months that followed, but since the Front during the election campaign seems to have had a vague project for nationalising the film industry, Goebbels' ideas were counter-productive. Another characteristic of French production during the period was the large number of foreign technicians and artists who were working there. Here the choice was clear: Ophuls, Siodmak, Litvak caused no trouble, so they were allowed to work, but for Pabst, Lang, Weill, Brecht, Lorre, it was a different story. See on this the article by J. Papillard, 'La France aux Français', in *Cinéma-Tographe* (edited by Franju and Langlois) no 2, June 1937. It is a violent attack on this policy.
45. J. Renoir, 'Le cinéma et les 40 heures - La production française veut vivre, il ne faut pas l'assassiner', in *Regards*, 29 October, 1936. Renoir's most interesting statements were, however, made in an article that is never quoted. It was written just after he had finished *La Vie est à Nous* and published, on Jeanson's insistence, in *La Flèche* (30 May, 1936).

Film directors are the sons of the bourgeoisie and they bring with them to this career the problems of their decadent class. The audience in first-release cinemas, which very often decides the initial success of a film, is also bourgeois. And only after this audience has confirmed the success of a film do the local cinemas rush to get it. The result of this is that the cinema, an essentially popular art, is manufactured and directed by people who are gradually moving further and further away from the people: we can see this year in and year out. The gulf between the upper class districts of Paris and working class Paris, between L'Etoile and the Bastille, becomes deeper every day. Soon it will be impassable and the capital of France will be divided into two enemy camps. The French cinema must without further delay be given back to the French people. It must be taken away from the merchants of the industry, the crooked business men, the artificial stars.

46. All the critics needed was a hint of a social problem and 'Frontist' epithets started flying. Sometimes even less than this was sufficient pretext. *La Flèche* discussing *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* made use of such epithets merely because Henry Fonda represented, 'a healthy and handsome worker who is not a scoundrel' unlike the workers seen in French productions.
47. Spaak and Renoir had decided to make the setting French, but Spaak relates how

a few days before shooting started, Renoir summoned me urgently to the production company office. Behaving very mysteriously and in a conspiratorial manner, he led me into the equipment storeroom, and he explained that after a night of thought he had changed his mind (. . .). An influential member of the Party, worried by our audacity, had advised Renoir to follow Gorky's work to the letter and to re-establish the Russian setting.

(C. Spaak, 'Jean Renoir', in *Paris-Cinéma*, 5 December, 1945.)

48. Zamyatin, the author of *We* and of the script, was in correspondence with Gorky while the film was being prepared (he speaks of this in *Pour Vous*, 24 November, 1936), but Gorky died before the film was finished.
49. G. Viazzi, *Jean Gabin*, Milan, 1956, p50.
50. *Esprit*, no 53, February 1937.
51. On behalf of the Communist Party, on the occasion of the prize that has been awarded you by the Louis Delluc jury for your fine film, *Les Bas-fonds*, praise be to you, the great director who has given us enduring works. Praise be to you also, great friend of the people, who has given us the film *La Vie est à Nous* and whose art serves the cause of human liberation. Yours in friendship, Jacques Duclos (in *La Cinématographie Française*, 26 December, 1936).
52. Duvivier made use of the worst demagogic move to justify the two endings. He introduced a preview of the film in a cinema in the suburbs, in Varenne to be exact. As one would expect, of the 366 votes cast by the spectators, 305 were for the optimistic ending. (*L'Action Cinématographique*, 25 November, 1936.)
53. See the interview with Carné published in *Ciné-Liberté*, no 5, 1 November, 1936.
54. G. Sadoul, *Regards*, 29 October, 1936.
55. J. Kress, *L'Avant-Garde*, 29 February, 1936.

56. G. Sadoul, *Regards*, 5 March, 1936.
57. G. Sadoul, *Regards*, 1 October, 1936.
58. The film was directed by H. Walschleger. It started Noël-Noël. This song has been analysed in an excellent piece by Robert Desnos (*La Flèche*, 13 June, 1936).
59. When the film was first released in Paris, there was a rumour that Buñuel had been seriously injured on the Guadarrama front, but it was soon proved false. (See G. Sadoul, in *Regards*, 29 October, 1936).
60. *Commune*, number 45, May 1937. The month of Guernica.
61. On the difference between the American and French versions, see C. Cosulich, *Jean Renoir*, FICC booklet number 2, Rome 1952, p23.
62. *Retour à la vie*, directed by F. Moch and J. Bréault. Auriol read a speech on the national loan in the film. It was a period of acute monetary crisis. (*L'Action Cinématographique*, 25 August, 1936). At just about the same time, the Front film exhibitors association was formed. Their symbol was a beret decorated with hammer and sickle and the three symbolic arrows of the Bergery group!
63. Statement by C. Aveline, in *Commune*, no 45, May 1937.
64. G. Rico, 'Les Films dangereux', in *Cinéma-Tographe*, no. 2, 1937. Archie Mayo's film is about the Ku Klux Klan. In the same issue, Langlois said of the ban: 'It is not logical, because, in the end, it is Blum who gives the orders (. . .). I look for, but I can find no reasons, even if there is one and it is obvious; but no, it is not possible, the government cannot be so cowardly'. The allusion is probably to the fact that a majority of the censorship commission belonged to the extreme right. (It is not clear why they were tolerated.) But perhaps it refers to something else. For See's circular on censorship, see *La Flèche*, 13 November, 1937.
65. In *Cinéma*, 30 March, 1936.
66. From a report that appeared in *Cinématographie française*.
67. *Cahiers de la jeunesse*, 15 November, 1937. Other organisations concerned with cinema also replied. The association of 'Eclaireurs' (young explorers, with a serious lay tradition . . .) announced the completion of work on *A Couer Joie*, a composite presentation that made use of film, radio and journalistic material. Their only explanation of it is that in the film 'life presents its amusing side in an epoch in which intelligence turns willingly against itself and, with a provisional satisfaction, it persists in its own self-destruction'. And Ciné-France, a movement of Protestant and Catholic young people and of family associations, protested because it wanted a pure, healthy cinema that elevated the spirit. In addition, the first step towards the participation of JOC (Young Catholic workers) was reported in Ciné-Liberté. (*L'Avant Garde*, 6 March, 1937). And what does the JOC want?

Beautiful examples of devotion, of solidarity, of honesty, of abnegation. That one talks a little more about the obscure devotion of our working mums and a little less about the pécadillos of unnameable adventurers. That one shows more of the beauty and richness of the rough work of our miners and less of the sad adventures of vulgar wrong-doers.

Ciné-Liberté agrees and announces new short films on popular aviation, on the railways . . .

68. J. Kress, in *L'Avant Garde*, 16 October, 1937.
69. *Cahiers de la jeunesse*, 15 September, 1937.
70. *L'Avant-Garde*, 2 October, 1937.

54 71. 'Quand on tourne chez Maurice Thorez', in *L'Avant-Garde*, 30 October, 1937.

72. It was one of the 'scandals' of 1937. When it was opened, only the Russian, German and Italian pavilions were ready. Arguments and corruption resulted in the French pavilions opening, one by one, only later in the year. Among the various Italian projects, Franciolini's activities merit note. He was supposed to shoot a documentary on Italian workers abroad. We do not know if it was ever made, but it is not difficult to imagine what its spirit would have been. (See in *La Cinématographie française*, 11 April, 1936, for the report of Franciolini's stay in Paris). A number of high Italian officials also visited Paris for the press show of *Verités sur l'Italie*, a long, fascist, propaganda documentary which had been banned by the French censor 'because of political circumstances'.

73. There is a great abundance of journalistic material on the preparation and shooting of the film, particularly in *L'Humanité* and Communist magazines. A few examples: G. Dulac's article, in *La Flèche*, 6 March, 1937 (in the film we see 'a people on the road to its emancipation, advancing against someone's wretched will, and a Europe united against new ideas'); *Commune*, April 1937 ('during the grandiose meeting of the 12th of March (. . .) where it was possible to hear Jeanson, G. Dulac, Pivert, Lagrange, Vaillant-Couturier, Bayet, Jarville, Renoir and Dreyfus, for Ciné-Liberté confirmed their ardent desire to see a united effort of goodwill so that the triumph of the first great national film can be ensured and that the film must be, to be more precise, France's film'; J. Renoir, 'La Marseillaise', in *Cahiers de la jeunesse*, 15 February, 1938; L. Weissleib, 'Interview with Renoir' in *L'Avant-Garde*, 2 January, 1937 (which, among other things, contains an exaltation of the Soviet system that was new for the usually cautious Renoir: 'liberty of existence is the promise of the new Renaissance that is taking place in the USSR . . .'; J. Kress, 'Une Heure avec Renoir', *ibid*, 13 March, 1937; J. Renoir, publicity brochure for the film, 1937- etc. In a recent interview (in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 78, Christmas 1957) Renoir presents a theory of human history while referring to this film. The seeds of this theory were already present in his work during the Front.

Excellent, undebatable, absolutely defensible principles disappear and even become criminal and ominous simply because they do not adapt to the epoch. And much less elaborated principles, based on much more ingenuous ideas, work admirably. They are in accord with the epoch (. . .). You can even say that during revolutions it is not the revolutionaries who win but the reactionaries who lose, which is very different. Even if there were no revolutionaries, the reactionaries would disappear by themselves.

74. On the 5th of March, 1937, socialist and Communist groups tried to stop a right-wing public meeting. The Front's police intervened: 5 dead and 300 injured. About twenty days before, Blum had given his famous speech to the bureaucrats announcing a 'pause' in social reforms.

75. B. Chardère, *op cit*, pp251-53.

76. *Cahiers de la jeunesse*, *art cit*.

77. In *France-Observateur*, 9 October, 1958, in reference to *La Grande Illusion*.

78. D. W. Brogan, *op cit*, vol 2, p437.

79. The best is Viazzi's previously quoted valuable booklet, *Jean Gabin*.

- Bazin's essay on *Le Jour se Lève*, in *Regards neufs sur le cinema*, Paris, 1953, is also interesting.
80. P. P. Trompeo, 'Zola e Renoir', in *Bianco e Nero*, no 8, August 1941.
 81. *L'Action Cinématographique*, 25 January, 1937.
 82. J. Prévert, 'Branle-vas de combat' (scenario par Raymond Bernard et Marcel L'Herbier) in *Cinéma-Tographe*, no 1, March 1937, and no 2, May 1937.
 83. L. Chavance, 'L'influence politique du cinéma', in *La Flèche*, 13 June, 1936.
 84. *Cinéma 38*, 25 October, 1938.
 85. J. Renoir, *Interview URCJ*, *op cit*.
 86. D. Guérin, *op cit*, p120, etc.
 87. In *Cinéma*, no 85, 10 January 1940.
 88. In *Confluences*, April 1944, signed 'Claude Jacquier'.
 89. Reply to a questionnaire on 'national sentiment' which appeared in *Cahiers de la Jeunesse* (the questions were of the type: Do you feel that you are a part of the national community? 'Faut-il continuer la France?' Should the France of 1938 show the world the path of human progress? etc). Giono answered 'No' to all the questions.

Editor's Notes

- [1] *Il Politecnico*: the most important vanguard marxist review in Italy; the key figures associated with it were Elio Vittorini and Franco Fortini. Launched in 1945 it tried to pursue an independent marxist line, but was eventually closed down after heavy pressure from the Communist Party.
- [2] Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian marxist theoretician, was imprisoned under the fascist regime and his works banned. The publication of his works in Italy after the war was a revelation and had considerable political effect.
- [3] Giorgio Amendola: the leader of the right wing of the Italian Communist Party, and main advocate of opportunist political alliance with forces to the right to the CP.
- [4] G. Dimitrov, leading Bulgarian Communist who was active in the Communist International and was spokesman for the United Front policies formally launched at the VII Congress of the International in 1935.
- [5] Palmiro Togliatti: head of the Italian Communist Party *de facto* from the time of Gramsci's imprisonment in 1926. Active in the Comintern, Togliatti pursued a united front line both in the International and on his return to Italy in 1944, where he led the Communists into a subordinate alliance with the Christian Democrats and other conservative parties.
- [6] The 7th Congress of the Communist International was held in Moscow from July 26 to August 20 in 1935. It formally adopted the new policy of the Popular Front, already put into practice by the French Communist Party, among others. Dimitrov reported to the Congress on the fight against fascism.
- [7] SFIO: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (French Section of the Workers' International).
- [8] Jean Epstein: Born Warsaw 1897, died 1953. One of the pioneers of French Cinema, as a maker of narrative, fantasy and documentary films and as a writer and film theorist, and he contributed

much to the development of film expression and the growth of film as an art.

In the early 1920's he abandoned his medical studies and published a book of poetry. In the 1920's he became a major figure of the French avant-garde with films like *Coeur Fidèle* and *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. He also published a number of books on film theory. In the 1930's Epstein concentrated on *Seascapes*, a series of documentaries, visual poems of the Brittany coastland, which represented a return to realism in film.

Germaine Dulac: Born Amiens 1882, died Paris 1942. She was among the first in France to consider cinema as a great art, and from 1916 on, she devoted herself entirely to it. With *La Fête Espagnole* (1919) (scenario by her friend Delluc) she became one of the established personalities of the 'impressionists' school. After *La Mort du Soleil* (1922) she made her masterpiece, *La Souriante Madame Boudet* (1922), a critique of petit-bourgeois conjugal life. When talking films prevented all independent production, she preferred to devote herself to newsreels. In addition she campaigned to spread and encourage interest in the cinema and she was important, after 1924, in helping to develop the cine-clubs movement. From 1920 on she published numerous historical writings, was a journalist and a militant feminist.

L'Herbier: Born Paris 1890. Refined, intelligent, cultivated, in love with art and research, he contributed to the development of film as an art form and to its means of expression. His *Eldorado* was hailed by Louis Delluc: 'That's cinema', and which became proverbial. An important member of the French avant-garde, his most important period was between 1918-1928. He later founded the IDHEC (Institut de Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques) whose international prestige has become considerable.

[9] L'Humanité: French Communist Party daily. cf reference below to *L'Huma*, abbreviation for same.

[10] The 'October Group' - see Fofi's note 27.

[11] Le Chanois, Jean-Paul (Dreyfus): Born Paris 1909. Coming from the avant-garde of 1930, he attained great popular success with simple and straight forward subjects. He wanted to 'put the heart back in its place, this heart which beats for all feelings, even good feelings', and he succeeded quite well in his best films, like *l'Ecole Buissonnière* or *Sans Laisser d'Adresse*, more justly appreciated outside of France than in our country. Critic for the *Cahiers du Cinema*, actor and director with the October group.

[12] Jacques Brunius: Born 1906, died 1967. Scientific training, but he abandoned his studies (aeronautics) and by 1929 was writing for cinema and surrealist reviews ('the only surrealist writer who has systematically occupied himself with cinematographic theory', Kynov).

Brunius began working in films at the end of the 1929's, assisting Clair and Buñuel and acting in films by Prévert (*L'Affaire est dans le Sac*) and Renoir (*Partie de Campagne*). In the early 1930's he directed a number of shorts in which he experimented with techniques. He worked both in France and in Britain and Cavalcanti brought him to Britain to work for the GPO Unit. Later he worked primarily as an actor and he was also important in educating British audiences to French cinema and in introducing, through his translations, new British drama to France.

[13] M. Allégret: Born Basle, Switzerland 1900. Made his debut with a documentary, accompanying Andre Gide to the Congo, then made, between 1930-1940, carefully done films which received notice,

such as *Mam'zelle Nitouche*, *Lac aux Dames*, *Sous les Yeux d'Occident*, *Orage*, *Entree des Artistes*. A great talent scout, he gave Simone Simon, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Michèle Morgan, Gérard Philipe, Danièle Delorme, Brigitte Bardot, etc, their first real chance.

Y. Allégret: Born Paris 1907. Brother of Marc, he wasn't able to assert himself until after the war, when he became the top specialist of the 'black film', with *Une si Jolie Petite Plage*, *Dédée d'Anvers*, *Manèges*. His ability and his generous qualities were demonstrated subsequently in successes like *Les Miracles n'ont Lieu qu'une Fois*, *Les Orgueilleux*, *la Meilleure Part*.

- [14] Mur des Fédérés: the wall where the leaders of the Paris Commune of 1872 were executed; a place of pilgrimage for the left.
- [15] CGT: Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour), the main left-wing French trade union federation.
- [16] Camelots du Roi; Croix-de-feu: right-wing ex-servicemen's and strong-arm organisations.
- [17] Huma - see above note 9.

Introduction Simon Hartog

'Je suis un marxiste de tendance groucho'.
Graffito, Paris, May 1968.

The *Etats Généraux du Cinéma Français* was born in the month of May 1968. If May '68 had a simple slogan, it was the surrealist command – resurrected by the Situationists: Make your dreams become reality.¹ Life became art, and art disappeared temporarily in the transformation. May '68 certainly belongs to the family of cataclysms which periodically reject the established structure of French society, but beyond that, definition is difficult. The terminology used today to describe May '68 demonstrates its ambiguous nature. The only generally accepted term is *les événements de mai*. The Left calls it simply *mai*. It was not a revolution, since there was no attempt to take power and establish a revolutionary government. The tone of the moment was joyous and anarchist. Authority evaporated. Political power became illusory. Poets were in the streets, and workers were occupying their factories. The existing power structures – the Left's as well as the State's – could neither control nor contain the explosion. To that extent it is possible and desirable to differentiate such cataclysms: May was a social revolt, brief and, at least in French terms, bloodless.

Culture and the control of it was at the heart of May's new amalgam of aesthetics and politics. 'La police vous parle . . .' screamed one of the *Atelier Populaire's* wall posters referring to the state controlled radio and television, but for the children of May all media were controlled by the police. The walls with their graffiti and their posters carried the movement's authentic voice. The traditional media, like the traditional political structures, were incapable of handling the volume and the imagination of the protests. Only the *Cinétracts* which were in any case a filmed fusion of wall posters, still photographs, and graffiti – and the still photograph managed in some way to overcome the media's general impotence. The marching students ignored the Chamber of Deputies, debated assaulting the ORTF, the state radio and television organisation, and eventually occupied the Odéon, the French National Theatre. They wanted to talk, and significantly they chose a theatre as their forum. May '68 was a debate as well as a carnival.

The *Etats Généraux* was the cinema's contribution to this debate. The projects this assembly considered remain May '68's most important practical contribution to the discussion about

restructuring the existing means of expression. The fact that the *Etats Généraux* was able to reach such a detailed level of discussion in such a short time and in such an ecstatic atmosphere is in some ways surprising, but the problem was not new. Lenin had raised it, and so had the Popular Front. But a much more recent event had re-opened the public debate. Some months before May '68, André Malraux, de Gaulle's Minister of Culture, had sacked Henri Langlois and closed the Cinémathèque Française which Langlois directed. To the Parisian cineastes – but not only the Parisian – it was as if the gates of heaven had been shut forever. The protest was immediate and violent. Film makers of the world united, and the French cineastes established a committee for the defence of the Cinémathèque. It was no accident that when the committee established an office (during May) at the Cannes Film Festival it became an arm of the May '68 movement, and from there Godard, Truffaut and others organised the premature end of the Film Festival. (The director declared the Festival suspended on May 19th).

In Paris, May '68 started on the 3rd when the police 'for the first time in history' entered the Sorbonne. On the 10th, the battle began. Barricades were erected in the rue Gay-Lussac. Within a week the movement had spread to the factories, and a spontaneous general strike paralysed 'essential services'. The black flag flew beside the red. On the 20th, Sartre defined May '68's attitude to art: 'A société réactionnaire, art révolutionnaire; à société révolutionnaire, art réactionnaire'. Within a fortnight the sleepless weeks of ecstasy ended, and 'order' was restored. Dream and reality uncoupled more from fatigue than disillusion.

The *Etats Généraux* was established at a meeting in the rue Vaugirard film school on the 17th. The name was suggested by a group from the *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The assembly eventually moved to Suresnes on the outskirts of Paris. Claude Degand, an official of the Centre National du Cinema and, for reasons which will become obvious, a not unbiased commentator, describes the *Etats Généraux* as a '... strange assembly of experienced technicians and other more obscure, film students or those calling themselves such, film journalists, syndicalists and franc-tireurs ... a thousand people completely detached from economic and legal realities ...'.² Towards the end of May, the *Etats Généraux* produced the first issue of its magazine, *Le Cinéma s'insurge*. More a manifesto than a magazine, it demanded: public ownership of the cinema, 'a complete restructuring of its means of production and diffusion', and workers' control of production, distribution, and exhibition.³ Although the assembly's major concern was a restructuring of the cinema, it considered the cinema as a part of a larger domain, the audio-visual culture.

The various projects presented, in addition to sharing these common goals, share common contempt for censorship, film distributors, and the Centre National du Cinema. The CNC, since it

60 has no equivalent in this country, and since it is the state body which is responsible for the cinema in France, deserves a short explanation. Administratively, it is responsible to the Ministry of Culture. The CNC collects statistics about the cinema, issues professional identity cards, drafts rules and legislation for most aspects of film making, distribution and exhibition, and distributes substantial amounts of money for film production. But in doing these things it acts as the state arm of the film industry's established commercial structures, and for this reason one of the first declarations of the *Etats Généraux* was: 'The assembly affirms that the CNC no longer exists'.⁴

With the general acceptance of basic principles, the context for the *Etats Généraux's* discussions was established. The debate and conflict within the *Etats Généraux* centered around the form and details of the restructuring. Any restructuring demands a certain number of crucial questions and definitions: in what sense, if any, is the cinema an industry? What does it include? What is its social function? How do you insure both freedom and full employment? How do you finance film making and how do you structure it? What does workers' control mean to a provincial projectionist, a laboratory worker, a clapper boy? Do you retain the 'private sector'? If you do, how do you organise the relationship between the public and the private (and the foreign) sectors? How do people enter the industry? How does the community participate?

These are the technical questions that any project for public ownership must consider and resolve. The projects considered by the *Etats Généraux* differ in vision and detail, character and design, approach and degree, but taken together they represent the most intense and serious collective debate about the cinema since the war. And that is, perhaps, an understatement. Even a bureaucrat like M. Degand is curiously contradictory in his attitude to the *Etats Généraux*: a lot of ideas were put forward, 'from the most intelligent restructuring of the cinema's professional and administrative world . . . to the most naive, innocent, and absurd proposals – but were they really? – such as free admission for all Frenchmen and the financing of production from taxes'.⁵ The *Etats Généraux*, however, saw the cinema in a different light, the light of May '68. 'Le Cinéma, c'est la liberté'.⁶

Notes to Introduction

1. For the most vital statement of the May '68 philosophy – even though it was written before the fact – see: Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, Paris, 1967.
2. Claude Degand, *Le cinéma . . . cette industrie*, Paris, 1972, pp 134-5.
3. *Le Cinéma s'insurge*, number 1, Paris, May 1968.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Degand, *op cit*, p 134.
6. *Le Cinéma s'insurge, op cit.*

PROJECTS FOR NEW STRUCTURES*

The essence of the Estates General lies in the effort – disorganised perhaps, but undertaken by all with varying degrees of radicalism towards a critique and transformation of the French cinema. Beyond the immediate proposals and tasks, the horizons of the general meetings and committees were set by the major Project – the rethinking of a new cinema. Nineteen projects of varying detail were proposed in the two weeks – an enormous task and a revolutionary step in itself, even if not all the projects reflected it to the same degree. We are publishing those projects (nos 16, 13, and 19) which were accorded the most votes by the Suresnes meeting, and also no 4, the battle horse of the most 'hard line' faction which brought down one after another all the other platforms defended at Suresnes. (Cahiers du Cinéma.)

The General Line (The Old and the New)

Project 16

This project was drawn up by a working party consisting of René Alio, J-L Comolli, Paula Delsol, R Dembo, J Doniol-Valcroze, J P Le Chanois, L Malle, J-P Mocky, J-D Pollet, A Resnais, R Rivette, Jacques Wagner.

The French cinema today is produced in slavery conditions engendered by the capitalist system, itself protected by a number of state-controlled bodies.

Any liberation of the cinema, any creation of new structures has to begin with the destruction of the old structures, described in the brief critical outline which constitutes the preamble to this project.

What characterises the system is the search for profits. Films are thereby reduced to a mere commodity. Their manufacture, distribution and consumption only incidentally take into consideration their artistic and cultural merit.

At the level of production, choice of subject and the final decision on content, genre and budget are in the hands of a few, whose powers extend to all the other levels. Given the total absence of planning the criteria which bring films into being are rarely based on any consideration of their more profound value, just their potential profits.

* The texts of these projects appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 203, August 1968. The notes which introduce each project were written by members of the *Cahiers'* editorial staff. They are translated and reprinted here with the permission of the editors.

62 *Film distribution* which in theory should be limited to a booking and despatch service, has been deflected from this original function to play a decision-making role and assume the functions of a bank. Commitment to routine, the absence of planning or reflection, and short-term reasoning have brought with them a method of operation which is defective even in terms of the capitalist system. The practice of levying extortionate distribution charges which take a large cut of the receipts exerts a kind of blackmail pressure on production which is obliged to align itself with the norms imposed in this way.

At the national level, in present conditions, distribution has finally ended in a resignation – the doors have been opened to foreign monopolies. Distribution is in such a state of bankruptcy that it has relinquished the power to select programmes, cinemas, or release dates: the spectators' access to films is organised in an arbitrary manner by a small number of all-powerful programmers.

Simple link-men in origin, they have won increasing power in French cinema. They now exercise a dictatorship over the exhibitors on a par with their influence over the distributors and, in consequence, over the producers.

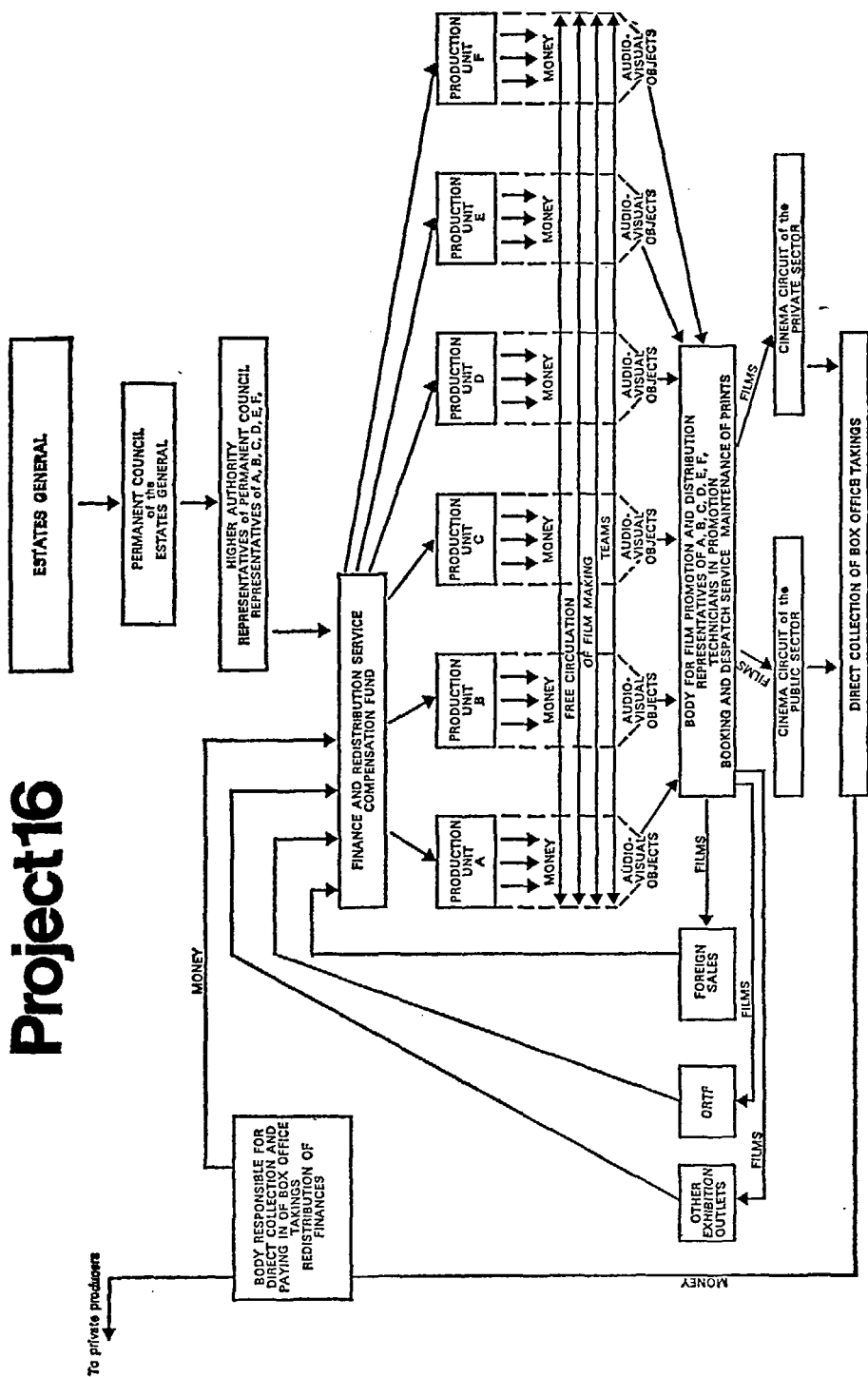
Lower down the line, the operations of the exhibitors are equally marked by a commitment to routine. No account is taken of changes in the public and its artistic and cultural needs, nor of the profound transformation of methods of selling on the level of capitalism itself. In all spheres of modern commerce, the seller goes out in search of the buyer – the exhibitors sit back and wait for him.

Lacking as they do any professional training, they despise the technique and the public. They see themselves as the owners of a product which has to be supplied to the consumer, and they censor and mutilate it as they feel inclined. Their antiquated selling techniques have contributed to the development of the crisis in which they are the first to suffer.

A palliative to these difficulties and the new demands of the public were thought to have been found in the so-called '*Art et essai*' circuit. This circuit persisted in traditional methods of exhibiting films and ended as a caricature, faced with the same exigencies of profit capitalism under a mask.

In all the four stages of its existence – production, distribution, programming, exhibition – the cinema is totally subject to capitalism. What is more, at all these levels the system is also characterised by its inefficiency and total failure in financial terms. This double failure explains its manifest inability to provide even a temporary solution to the problems of under-employment, unemployment, essential advancement within the professions, the need for openings into film work for young people. This system lays claim to free enterprise while in fact exercising a monopoly that precludes any possibility of competition. The unquestionable artistic successes

Project 16



64 that emerge do so only through chance and the system's total lack of homogeneity.

The State is supposed to exercise a system of control, even planning power, over the industrial and commercial aspects of cinema. In fact, the various organs of the state – particularly the Centre Nationale du Cinéma – which embody the role are just a shield to protect the capitalist system. The State is not an arbiter, it is a partner. Through the CNC the regulations applied to the various levels of activity in the cinema constitute a corporate-type bureaucratic structure. While it is true that private industry and commerce have to suffer certain forms of control, it is a fact that overall these structures serve to protect capitalism.

In the same way, Government censorship reinforces the censorship exercised by capital at the different stages of the life of a film to defend and maintain a social order which has everything to fear from freedom.

The body known as Unifrance Films, which is theoretically charged with promoting French films abroad and financed, through the *Fonds de Soutien*, by the spectator himself, is entirely in the hands of the employers who are therefore responsible for the wastage they sometimes see fit to denounce.

The deeply entrenched mechanism which defines the relations between the State and capitalism in the cinema is thus plainly apparent: capital pays lip service to a liberal economy but uses the State to evade the consequences of its own contradictions. The employers have recourse to a theoretical liberalism in their claims to support full employment. In reality the powers they ask for are already theirs, and they have made the worst possible use of them. Their paternalism amounts to saying: 'Let us have a free hand and maybe there'll be more of you little pigs, better housed and fed'.

The State has provided itself with an alibi: it introduced creative freedom into the system through the device of advance loans on takings at the project stage of the film. It ensures that the film makers don't rebel against monopoly take overs, by entrusting them with a new monopoly, but in relation to the basic monopoly, theirs is a mockery.

A false conflict is set up in this way between the favoured and the unfavoured, a conflict which makes them lose sight of the true opponent: monopoly capitalism.

The State also intervenes in the life of the cinema in the field of education. Teaching takes the most arbitrary forms, but it too is totally bound to the capitalist system of film production whose structures are neither questioned nor even, in many cases, studied.

Moreover this education is aimed at an elite and trains technicians to serve the system as it exists. It is not founded on any desire to spread a training for the cinema into traditional education. And the spectator, who must also be formed by a knowledge

of the art of film, is given no access to the study of its techniques. Its tendency therefore is to protect the monopolies by keeping back cinematic training from the majority.

There are two more fields where the structures of cinema have a profoundly negative aspect:

On the level of the technical industries the law which aims at maximising the recovery of investment and profitability of the tools of production delays and obstructs technical progress. Out of date instruments are still used with a view to profits which would be well in excess even of the recovery of capital invested. This explains the delay in putting into operation the manufacture of a light synchronised camera, magnetic tapes, and high-speed film, whose technical perfection has already been established. Capitalism does not feel itself complete master of the development of new means, it only uses them when it has them under control. This has in the past explained the delay in the utilisation of the sound film and wide screen in the years after their invention. Far from combating this state of affairs, the instruments for the promotion and regulation of technique – the Commission Supérieure Technique and the Bureau de Normalisation – indirectly facilitate the action of the monopolies.

On the other hand, the organisation and structures of private capital and the State tend systematically to separate the various modes of audio-visual expression. Arbitrary barriers are systematically set to separate cinema and television, or they are even set in competition with or opposition to each other. And similarly, the creation of a new means of diffusion or the transformation of the old is shackled, opposed or prohibited.

In France, the capitalist cinema is in reality not a viable industry, nor a prosperous business, not a means of expression, nor a cultural method. To create a cinema which would be founded on the responsibility of its producers, to enable spectators – who would thereby also be responsible – to become producers, the existing structures have to be destroyed.

Obviously therefore, all demands, all modifications or partial reforms of the structures cannot put an end to the alienation of the cinema by capital unless they are conceived as the first step in the creation of new structures.

Schema of New Structures

Therefore, to make a radical break with this system of constraints which cripples both people and organisations we must create a privileged public sector of film work which in its first stages would enter into competition with the private sector; and the private sector itself needs to be divested of the parasitic mechanisms which hold it back at present.

Two systems of measures flow from this:

– General measures which would involve the whole of cinematic

66 activity transformed in this way, and would benefit both the new Public Sector and the Private Sector.

– Measures which would allow for and maintain the existence and growth of the Public Sector.

An outline of these two systems:

General Measures

– The recognition of the absolute right of all to freedom of expression and therefore the suppression of any body which authorises and organises control and censorship.

– The abolition of the totality of existing regulations and the bodies which incarnate them.

– Putting into effective operation a basic principle (which playwrights and musicians have benefited from for some time through such organisations as the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques and the Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique) the direct receipt of box office takings (a 1957 law never implemented) by a body which has exclusive charge of the paying in, checking and direct re-distribution of this money: the result would be a considerable increase in takings.

The operation of this principle would be accompanied by the suppression of performance tax.

– The abolition of the existing compartmentalisation between television and the cinema through a mutual exchange of the audio-visual objects they produce (all films, including shorts, animation films, newsreels, etc) and the free circulation of the workers they employ (producers, writers, directors, technicians, workers and performers).

Public Sector

This sector will operate on principles of autonomy and self-management and will be based on the total absence of profit-making as a goal. These principles entail the following system of measures:

1. The creation of a certain number of Production Units (the number to be determined according to the overall budget).

These Production Units will in the first instance be a certain amount of money – part of the overall budget of the Public Sector – earmarked for the production of audio-visual objects.

These Production Units will constitute a reception structure. Their function will be to enable any project to pass to the film stage, whatever the form in which it is presented (*project* being defined as the juncture of an intention to create a specific audio-visual object – or one to be specified – and a film making unit which assumes the responsibility and the work for its realisation). And this holds from the moment when the project is at the stage where all it lacks is the financial means for its realisation. These Production Units imply a free circulation of workers (producers, writers, directors, technicians, workers, performers) as well as a

freedom of choice on their part: the principle defended here is the opportunity for maximum differentiation in objects produced and methods of production – within each unit among the various teams, and within the sector as a whole, among the various production units.

It is assumed that one part of the annual budget of each Production Unit will go to the production of first films.

These Production Units will be activated artistically and managed financially by officers from all branches of film work who will have room to manoeuvre in the choice of a system of operation (collective responsibility, or sole responsibility, etc). These officers will be elected every two years by the Permanent Council of the Estates General (see appendix).

We have described the Production Units first because, together with the direct paying in of box office takings, they seem to us to be the essential and motor element of the Public Sector.

We now propose to outline the total schema in which they are integrated. For convenience we will postulate the possibility of creating at least six Production Units. But it must, of course, be understood that the real number will depend on the total finances which can be pumped into the Public Sector for their operation at the start: the system will have a commitment to seeing the number of these Production Units grow.

2. Officers from among the heads of the Production Units together with representation from the Permanent Council of the Estates General will form a higher authority whose role will be:

- to establish the possibility of recourse and arbitration;
- liaison between the different Production Units;
- to distribute firstly the initial overall budget and then the box office revenues;
- after a certain time to establish a structure for compensating and balancing the credits and deficits of one Unit with another through the intermediary of a fund set up to this effect. Once the overall annual budget has been distributed among the different Production Units by the higher authority, these will be free to decide the re-distribution of this sum among the responsible teams engaged in carrying out the projects selected.

At no time will either the higher authority or the heads of the various Production Units take on themselves the right to reverse a production decision made at another level. That is, the shooting, completion and promotion of the films financed by the Public Sector will be the sole responsibility of each team engaged on the particular film.

3. At the end of production, these audio-visual objects will be distributed by a Promotion and Distribution Body.

This body will be constituted as follows:

- by representatives from the various Production Units (who will not be the same as those sitting on the higher authority);

- 68 – by technicians working in promotion and distribution;
– by the officers of the film making teams who will participate in the work of promotion and exhibition at the point when their films have reached this stage, and only for their own films.

This body will have at its disposal all the means necessary for its operation (booking and despatch services, a service for checking and maintaining the audio-visual objects it deals with, etc).

Its first object will be to put into effect a new commitment to audience research and promotion via all types of already tried methods (alternation of programmes, subscriptions, group sales, creation of new networks such as universities, schools, etc collaboration with existing non-commercial sector) and those which may emerge from research into this field.

The Promotion and Distribution Body will also ensure that audio-visual objects reach the means and sectors in existence now or envisaged in the future (film cassettes, video circuits, ORTF, other television channels, foreign sales, cinema chains, in both public and private sectors).

For clearly, on the level of the cinemas, there will be a parallel and competitive existence of a Private Sector and a Public Sector.

4. The cinemas of the Public Sector will be created as follows:

- by nationalising a certain number of cinemas or circuits already in existence;
- by constructing new cinemas, especially in the major urban centres.

5. Relations between the Public and Private Sector will also allow for collaboration: in the purchase and exhibition of French and foreign films produced in the private sector, the purchase of films made by independent film makers at their own expense, co-production with countries abroad, exhibition agreements either directly with the owners of private cinemas for which the public sector will in some sense be a programmer, or with existing circuits in the private sector.

Equally, the workers (producers, writers, film makers, workers and actors) will be free to work in either sector as they choose.

6. The money (which as we have seen will be freed of parasitic charges, its circulation considerably accelerated by the system of direct receipt) brought in at the box office level of the cinema circuits and other outlets, will return to the Production Units via an accounts service which, for the public sector will be linked to the higher authority defined above. The latter will distribute this money to the Production Units, thereby closing the circuit.

A part of this money must be invested in the creation of new Production Units, the improvement and development of the material and technical holdings, in theoretical research, education and the donation of copies of the works produced to the Cinemathèque Française. It should be stressed that, independently of this donation in the means for research flowing from the investment men-

tioned above, there should be a commitment to research manifest at all levels of the public sector (technique, material, the different bases and gauges, methodology, aesthetics, relations with the public, etc).

7. It is self evident that in order to go into operation the Public Sector will have to be financed by an initial grant which could be set up:

- by the part of the *Fonds de Soutien* not derived from automatic subsidy and up till now devoted to advance loans on takings, the operation of Unifrance Films, etc;

- by an advance from ORTF;

- by a complementary grant from the State.

It is also obvious that a system of legislation will have to be set up, as was said earlier, to complete this system of measures and ensure that the Public Sector as described is maintained and developed.

Principal Consequences

An important increase in the number of films produced due on the one hand to the freedom of the Production Units and on the other to, as we have emphasised, the abandonment of the capitalist profit law, and finally to the rationalisation of the system of returns and financial viability.

An immediate increase in the employment market, its continuous expansion through the creation of new Production Units, the possibility of progressively re-absorbing unemployment and providing new jobs for new arrivals.

Wage parity in the different kinds of audio-visual production.

The establishment of a systems of production which is under constant review and criticism, and allows for all kinds of experimentation, both technical and economic.

Appendix

The Estates General of the Cinema are constituted by all audio-visual professions, students in audio-visual education, and in a general way, all those concerned with the cinema.

The Estates General elects the Permanent Council composed of 60 members. This Council will be renewed each year, its members not being eligible for re-election in the following session.

The task of the Council will be:

- To represent the Estates General in relation to public authorities;
- To choose the officers of the Production Units, on the assumption that each of these units will define its own characteristics on the level of structures of operation as well as cultural orientation. It has been established that leading figures of the profession will agree to take part in these Production Units;
- To organise the annual general meeting of the Estates General;
- To call an extraordinary general meeting at any point if the need arises.

70 The heads of the Production Units will be reappointed or replaced by the Permanent Council of the Estates General.

Project 13

Presented by Pierre Lhomme and drawn up by a collective composed of technicians and officers of the Syndicat des Techniciens du film CGT (including Henri Faviani, Philippe Arthuys, Jean Michaud-Maillan), this project was worked out and approved at numerous working sessions by the majority of the technicians affiliated to the union and involved in the Estates General. (Cahiers du Cinéma.)

Preamble

The Estates General of the French Cinema at its annual general meeting on May 26, 1968 asserts the failure of the reactionary and arbitrary economic structures of the French film industry.

The National Film Centre (Centre Nationale du Cinéma) and its governing body have codified and given official status to the reactionary and arbitrary policy of the heads of French cinema: exhibitors, distributors, producers and technical industries.

The Estates General therefore no longer recognises the authority of the CNC and refuses to consider it a valid partner in debate.

Principles

The Estates General of the Cinema, considering themselves the final authority, have met to give shape to new structures in their discussions.

In principle they put forward the following points which constitute their Charter:

The cinema is a universal mode of language and as such belongs to all. The Estates General demands therefore:

- freedom of expression and the abolition of censorship;
- the means for a permanent and democratic training in its écriture and interpretation:

- a. at the level of the teaching of audio-visual techniques within a school which brings together the disciplines as a whole;

- b. at the level of access to film culture, primary and secondary education, as well as in all spheres of social life.

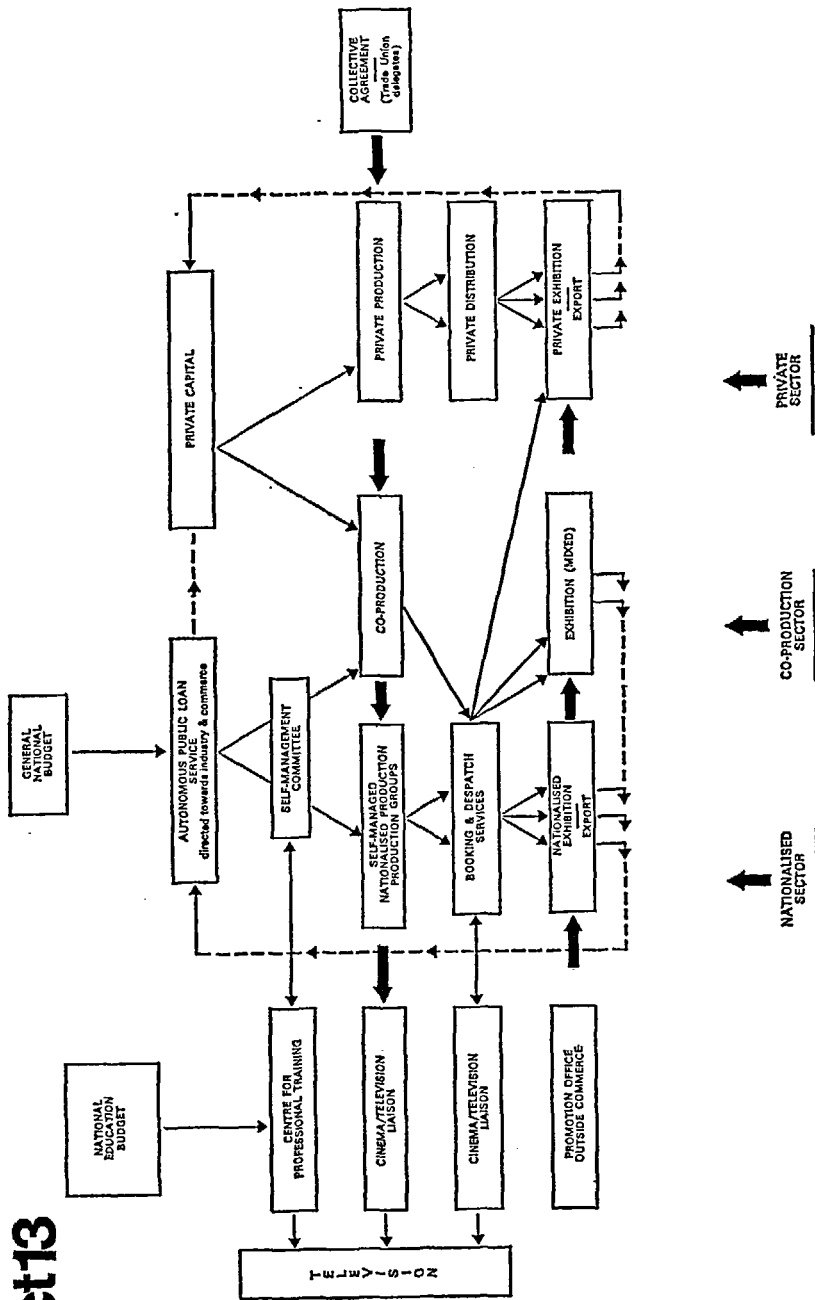
This is in order to develop individual understanding and familiarity with the audio-visual field as well as to allow for the extension of creative freedom.

For all those who produce the cinema, the right to master and control the means of production, exhibition, education and research.

These principles lead necessarily to workers' control

- *Workers' control* is not the trap laid by capitalism giving workers an interest in the success of the enterprise.

Project13



72 – *Workers' control* is a taking of power: by obliging everyone to assume his responsibilities within the collective framework, it guarantees the freedom of all.

– *Workers' control* can be realised in a liberal economy as well as in an economy which tends towards socialism.

Two sectors co-exist:

– a self-managed nationalised sector;

– a private sector.

Self-managed Nationalised Sector

The essential organ of the nationalised sector is an autonomous Public Loan Service, directed towards industry and commerce, co-managed on an equal basis by representatives of the State and those who work in the cinema.

Financial operation

– a capital grant written into the general State budget.

– box office returns – with an accelerated system for the collection of these revenues, the share going to the production units being increased by the quasi total suppression of the distribution charges (the distributor's cut).

Production

– This Public Loan Service will include the production groups which will themselves be based and operated on principles of free circulation of personnel (cinema, television) and the principle of elected and replaceable managements.

– The choice of subjects will be effected at the level of these production groups in both the self-managed sector and in co-productions with the private sector.

– Financing will be ensured through the Public Loan Service. The notion of financial viability will be balanced by notions of research and permanent review. Production groups will play a pilot role.

Distribution and exhibition

Distribution in the classic sense will be replaced by a physical distribution in the form of a national body for film booking and despatch.

This body will pursue a policy of nationalisation of the cinemas. It will be able to work in collaboration with existing private cinemas. It will seek to create new nationalised cinemas, taking account of population changes, the need for decentralisation, first runs, and new techniques for the projection and reception of images (magnetic tracks, electronic transmission centres, etc).

A committee of experts specialised in promotion will be created to launch and support the career of *each* film.

Technical industries

Given the need to guarantee national production in the context of the Common Market a competitive production centre (Cinema

City) will be created which will be part of the self-managed sector's area.

The work of the conception and realisation of the technical industries will need to be coordinated both within the private sector itself and in relation to the self-managed sector. This system will favour initiatives towards decentralisation.

Private Sector

A Private Sector will continue to exist, freed of any State control, except of course insofar as the general system of taxation is concerned.

Co-productions

The possibility of co-productions between the private sector and the nationalised self-managed sector being recognised:

- co-productions with other countries, especially those of the Third World, will be developed;
- research will be undertaken to find new markets abroad for French production as a whole;
- the quota system will be abolished and replaced by a system of reciprocal agreements.

For the mechanics of the operation of the system as a whole (self-managed nationalised sector and private sector) see the diagram on page 70. For the sake of comprehensibility this has been limited to certain sections only of the production and finance circuits envisaged

The possibility of establishing a regulating mechanism which would aim to balance the overall revenues (self-managed sector and private sector) in relation to the market will be examined.

Conclusion

The nationalised sector has been conceived within a perspective which involves re-assembling and inter-relating all the future audio-visual activities of the country (cinema, television, a teaching and research centre, new forms of diffusion linked in particular with the development of magnetic tapes, etc). The form the association with the television and teaching and research sectors will take cannot be seriously defined at the moment without consultation with the workers, producers, students and researchers in all these branches of the audio-visual field.

Project 4

Proposed by Thierry Derocles and drawn up by Michel Demoule, Claude Chabrol, Marin Karmitz. This was considered to be totally utopian by some and by others (a growing number, it's true) as the only truly revolutionary project presented. It was to this uniqueness that it owed its extremely positive role of stimulus, agitation, and provocation of bad faith. But its role was also in some senses a negative one. Its defenders opposed the final project so violently

- 74 *that they prevented any serious debate, and this hinged on a confusion which was never brought out: should the new structures in question at Suresnes be concerned with a militant, politicised and revolutionary cinema, or should they rather simply organise and improve the conditions of that same consumers' cinema – albeit coloured by political consciousness – which we have to deal with in France. (Cahiers du Cinéma.)*

Preamble

It is just and proper that every person should have the right to participate with his fellows in the development of all. The breadth and content of the events of May '68 have made it impossible to go on accepting past alienations. This is what gives these events a revolutionary significance. As a participant in the cultural development of all, the audio-visual area must revolutionise its way of existing. This is what the following project proposes.

The audio-visual area must become a public service, independent of the Government, within the framework of an Office which brings film and television together on a national level and establishes:

- free access to its presentations;
- a genuine decentralisation of culture;
- an opportunity for all to become professionals;

This Office would be divided into two services: one for television, the other for the cinema. While these two sections have to overlap in the brief of the Estates General, we have nevertheless confined ourselves to a consideration of the cinema.

Financing

The cost of a system of free admission and of production (film stock, salaries, etc) is met through the participation of the country as a whole.

For example, an annual fee of 100f (about £8) for every five inhabitants establishes an annual budget of one thousand million francs (about £80 million) which generously exceeds the present finances available to the French film industry. The spectators become producers.

This system of financing allows for an increase in the number of films produced and consequently in the numbers of jobs available, thus militating against unemployment.

The average cost per production will be calculated annually. Any budget that is less than or equal to this average cost is accepted automatically. Every budget higher than the average cost will be discussed by a committee composed of film workers and spectators.

The budget of a film is drawn up by all those involved in its production, and responsible for it from the initial stage to release.

The Office will buy foreign films and sell French films abroad.

The Office will organise and administer the distribution of these

films and their exhibition through the cinemas, whose directors will become managers appointed by the Office.

From the moment he starts work on his first film the film worker will be paid a uniform monthly salary.

He will receive a second salary calculated on the basis of qualifications for every film he works on. A minimum work standard can be established.

Where a film is sold abroad, the sale price is divided equally between the Office and the production team. The sum received by the production team is divided equally among all the members of the team and is in addition to the two previously mentioned salaries.

Extension

The cinema must search out its public and its workers in their own environment.

The regional centres of the Office must therefore not only provide for film exhibition, but also for film production and professional training in all regions of the country.

Film studios must be created at each of these regional centres.

New cinemas must be established, but mobile projection units must also be set up so that films may reach factories and rural communities where a cinema would not be appropriate.

Professional Training

Genius and talent are not learnt. Technique is acquired by experience. Therefore all traditional notions about schools have to be abandoned.

Direct contact with the profession before professional training has been acquired will discourage doubtful vocations. To this end all potential candidates would go through two stages:

- a first stage of basic information completed by discussions among the trainees;
- a second, during which the student would take part in a school production and in discussions with professionals.

These two stages can be organised in any centre of the Office, but the students will be financed by the Ministry of Education as laid down by the new University structures. After these two stages the students will take part in two all-student productions, work on which will have included discussions by the students among themselves and with professionals. These films will be financed by the Office. While working on them students will be in receipt of a uniform monthly pre-salary. On completion of the two films, the students will be considered professionals and will enjoy the same conditions.

An experimental centre for professional film workers open to students must be created:

- to allow for pure research;
- to provide technicians with training for the new techniques which

- 76 may emerge during their career;
– to prevent excessive isolation into specialisations and provide for a genuine advancement within the profession.

The authors of this project are aware of the utopian air of this document. They nevertheless give their assurance that this utopia is realisable practically in any economic system, and they consider its apparent insanity as the very proof of its seriousness. They are prepared to defend and explain it in any circumstances.

Project 19

This project, moved by Michel Cournot, was drawn up by a group around Marcel Carné, Claude Lelouch, Robert Enrico, Jean-Gabriel Albicocco, Serge Roulet, etc. We are publishing only those proposals which are original to this project. (Cahiers du Cinéma.)

. . . 8. The creative work of film makers will from now on be exercised in *Film Making Groups (Groupes de Création)* which are formed spontaneously and simply numbered from No 1 onwards as and when they arise. However profound the reforms of cinema as a whole proposed by this project, it is worth noting that the appellation 'Groupe de Création' in fact designates a kind of work cell which has already been introduced into the French cinema in the last few years: in fact certain particularly dynamic and deserving production companies already are such Film Making Groups, not of course in their relations to the State, but in their internal attitudes and organisation.

This is why we feel that the old production companies will have no difficulty in gradually acquiring the status of Film Making Groups if only to take advantage of the considerable advances these will bring to the cinema.

9. The Film Making Group will be a legally recognised society.

10. Each Film Making Group will elect its group director who will be the officer legally responsible.

11. Each Film Making Group will be an independent and self-managed body whose object will be to produce films of all lengths gauge and base.

12. Each group will fix the number of producers, writers, directors, actors, technicians, workers, administrative personnel, etc who work within it and who will be free to move from one group to another with the agreement of their own group.

Each Group will however have an obligation to take on a number of paid trainees in every branch of production.

13. All members of the group will be paid a salary and have an additional interest in the revenues from the works produced by the group. Over and above a certain ceiling, what might be termed the excess amount in the highest salaries, should be shared among the members of the group.

14. While the general principle of the *Fonds d'Aide* will be maintained, its returns being put towards sales abroad and its grants covered, thereafter the aid a Film Making Group receives through the distribution of one of its films is acquired by the group once and for all, irrespective of the movements of the director of the film.

15. One part of the resources of the *Fonds d'Aide* must be put towards the making of a first film within each group. Another part goes to the maker of the film to enable him to become co-producer.

16. *Each group is responsible for its own planning.* It will acquire its stock gradually. It will take charge of the campaign to launch its film itself.

Each *Film Making Group* has complete freedom to set up co-productions with French and foreign financiers.

17. Every finished film will remain in ethical and artistic terms the property of its maker.

18. Every finished film made by a *Film Making Group* will be entrusted to the *National Society for Distribution* for its distribution.

19. The *National Society for Distribution* will be managed by a committee elected by the Estates General. It will be authorised to distribute all the films produced by the *Film Making Groups* in places where it has set up agreements. It will be an autonomous body *functioning as a booking and delivery service and ensuring the physical distribution of films.* The Society will be non-profit making.

20. The *National Society for Distribution* will distribute films to all possible projection sites: cinemas in the accepted sense as well as local film societies, factories and firms, schools and universities, youth clubs and cultural centres, ships, trains, aeroplanes and other means of transport, and mobile projection units created in suburban and country areas.

This applies to films of any length, gauge and base.

By virtue of the completeness of its distribution activities, the National Society for Distribution will, for the first time in this country, guarantee the public freedom of access to the productions of cinema.

21. In order to be in a material position to undertake the function of film booking for the growing number of films which will be produced in this country given the new structures, the *National Society for Distribution* will operate a number of services, the division of responsibilities to be worked out through practice.

22. The *National Society for Distribution* will be entrusted with the equipping of new cinemas, and the renovation of existing ones. It will keep a check on the technical quality of projection and on the comfort of spectators. It will also be responsible for preserving the quality of copies in circulation.

23. The *National Society for Distribution* will also take charge of distribution abroad.

78 24. Two groups working in close collaboration with the National Society for Distribution will take charge of the work of accounting and financing, and of film promotion.

25. The Finance group will take charge of the collection and distribution of revenues from the cinemas.

It will pay in directly the total receipts and re-distribute them:

– *To the State*: taxes will be reduced, shorts and informational films henceforth enjoying a fiscal status analogous to the book, rather than being assimilated to that of perfumes and fashion as is the case today.

– *To the exhibitors*: the present 'distribution committee' will be reduced as far as possible in order to increase by an equivalent amount the share of the Film Making Groups and all film workers, and to accelerate the recovery of the costs of the film thereby producing more films, achieving more work.

– *To the various Groups and Services within French cinema*: as defined by this plan – the National Society for Distribution, the Group, Promotion, grant for first films, Film School, Cinemathèque and the Maison du Cinema, the Finance Group, the Services of the Estates General and their Committees to maintain their operation.

– *To the Film Making Groups*: in the form of a production-share, part grant and part workers' share in the revenues.

26. The Finance Group will allocate a part of the aid fund to the establishment of a fund for advance loans on receipts.

The Committee for Advance Loans will be elected by the Annual General Meeting.

This will represent all film workers. It will be open to re-election and replacement.

Criteria based on the reading of a scenario, so-called professional references and curriculum vitae are no longer considered determining for the allocation of advances on receipts.

A film only resembles itself and the film maker can only defend his project with his art. The loan committee will therefore give him the opportunity to make either a short film or a number of sequences of his projected film.

When he comes before the Loan Committee with this footage to defend his project, he may be supported by two people of his own choice.

27. A Promotion Group will be charged with carrying out when required and according to the directives of the Film Making Group the launching of new films in this country and abroad.

With the technical help of the Promotion Group, the Film Making Group is therefore responsible for the methods and costs of launching and cannot recoup the expenses of this publicity in the course of the film's exhibition.

The 'Synthesis' Project

At the end of the second general meeting at Suresnes, the authors

of projects 16, 13 and 19, having observed a certain convergence between their platforms, decided to work out a common text which would then be submitted to the participants in the Estates General. And so this synthesis project was drawn up, its fault being precisely that it neglects contradictions and divergencies for the sake of an ineffectual agreement. The contradictions were in the end too strong to remain concealed for long; they could not fail to explode and thereby undermine any 'synthesis'. (Cahiers du Cinéma.)

The creation of a self-managed public sector accompanied by a specific arsenal against the survival and rebirth of the monopolies is the immediate practical way in which to bring the cinema amongst the people.

Authorities

1. The *Estates General of the Cinema* are constituted by all those working in the audio-visual field, students from audio-visual education and, in a general way, all those who are concerned with the cinema.

2. The Estates General will meet every year at an Ordinary General Meeting: they will elect the Permanent Council of the Estates General in accordance with a system of proportional representation; candidate lists will adhere to a percentage, fixed by the Estates General, of the different professional and non-professional categories which make up the Assembly.

3. An Extraordinary General Meeting may be called at any point by the Estates General on the demand of a third of the members of the Permanent Council.

4. The Permanent Council will be composed of 60 members elected by the Ordinary Meeting of the Estates General. A third of its membership will be renewed each year.

5. The Permanent Council will represent the Estates General with the public authorities. It will choose the officers of the various Production Units whose number it will determine. It will decide the general financial policy and supervise that policy, determining the part of the budget to be set aside for investment and that reserved for the production of audio-visual objects.

It will supervise the technical, legal, administrative and financial bodies, in consultation with specialists in these various fields.

6. Delegates from the Permanent Council and an equal number of delegates from the different Production Units will form a Committee for Self-Management, which will also include the officers of the Film Making Groups.

7. The Committee for Self-Management will plan the overall annual production budget in terms of jobs, market and Production Unit programmes, and present it for approval to the Permanent Council. The Council will constitute an opportunity for recourse and arbitration between the various Production units and for isolated pro-

- 80 jects or programmes turned away by all the production Units.
8. Each Production Unit will be managed by an assembly of seven members from all branches of film work, designated by the Permanent Council and re-appointed or replaced every three years.
 9. The managing bodies of the Production Units will co-ordinate the programmes of the various Film Making Groups in terms of the materials and finances at their disposal, the personnel they manage and the overall amount of work they bring to the technical industries.

Production Units

1. The functioning of the public sector is based on the notions film *Projects* and *Programmes*.

The film *Project* is the juncture of an intention to make an audio-visual object and a team which takes on the responsibility and work for its realisation.

The *Programme* is the association of a number of such projects on the level of work and responsibilities. It becomes a Film Making Group when it is granted an appropriate budget for the realisation of the programme.

The Film Making Groups have their programmes selected and accepted by a Production Unit as defined in paragraph 8. of the preceding chapter.

2. A Film Making Group consists of technicians, actors, workers, writers, directors, administrators, associated around the programme. To ensure fair and balanced progression within the professions the group will include, aside from its experienced professionals, less experienced workers and trainees engaged on their first work.

The group will be self-managed, and elect its officer or officers. It will define its own structures and carry out its programme free of any constraints. It will take charge of the training and advancement of paid trainees in every branch of film making.

Every three years the group will report on its management to the *Committee for Self-Management*.

3. In order to ensure a real lowering of production costs the Film Making Group's programme must not be less than a minimum of four feature-length films (which need not necessarily have identical budgets). This programme can be supplemented by films of different length, concept and gauge.

4. In order to reflect the diversity of cinema, the Film Making Groups may set themselves up around programmes of shorts, animation or 'specialist films'. Their programme may lead into films of varied length, concept and gauge.

5. To carry out its programme, the Film Making Group will receive an appropriate grant, fixed by agreement between the officer(s) of the Group and the Production Unit which accepts it.

Each Group will receive the whole of its revenues up to the

recuperation of costs. It then receives a part of its profits fixed by the Committee for Self-Management. The remainder returns to the compensation fund which regulates the public sector.

6. The basic principle is that receipts and profits are not the criteria for the evaluation of a film and any Film Making Group which incurs a loss, providing there has been no major error in management, may present a new programme.

The goal of the system being the increase in the number of film making groups, any Film Making Group which earns an extensive profit will thereby exceed a determined ceiling and give rise to a new group.

7. A minimum salary will be guaranteed by a collective national agreement. Given mutual agreement within a Film Making Group, certain very high salaries may be shared.

8. There will be a guaranteed free circulation of all categories of professionals among the various Film Making Groups themselves and with the private sector. It would be desirable for this principle of free circulation to be extended to television.

9. Decentralisation of Production Units and Film Making Groups is desirable. These two types of organisations may therefore, if they wish, establish themselves outside Paris.

10. Isolated projects or programmes which failed to be received into a Production Unit can be presented to the Committee for Self-Management. The Committee has the right to instigate the realisation of a certain number of them through the reserve fund drawn from the annual grant of the Production Units.

11. The Film Making Groups may co-produce among themselves. They can also enter into co-production, on condition that they remain dominant, with:

- producers from the private sector;
- foreign producers;
- French and foreign television.

All co-production is subject to the approval of the Committee for Self-Management.

Distribution

I. Principles:

Today the spectator believes he chooses the films he goes to see while in reality they are imposed on him.

He is subjected to an ideological, political and economic conditioning. The existing confusion must be replaced by an unequivocal contact between the spectator and the audio-visual object.

The notion of profit brings with it an imbalance in the market and generates monopolies.

Financial viability will be generalised and rationalised. No cinema, and no audio-visual object will be able to build its own expansion on the decline of another.

Only the rationalisation of distribution allows for a fruitful

- 82 contact between spectator and audio-visual object which thereby would have every possibility of finding its specific audience.

II Means of practical application:

a Basic principle

Direct and immediate receipt of box office takings from cinemas in both the public and private sector.

b. Description of new structures

The creation of a single National Distribution Body for the production of both public and private sector. This body will see that audio-visual objects are channelled towards all the distribution outlets in existence at the moment or envisaged in the future (private and public cinemas, sales abroad, video circuits, cassettes, television, etc).

It will include:

- A *policy* body in which the officers of the different sectors of production will participate. Its role will be to define a distribution policy which should ensure that each film finds its real audience. It will concern itself with the search for a new public and the constant and progressive development of the existing public;
- A *planning* body which will rationalise the programming of audio-visual objects in terms of the following information:

- analysis of the features of each film

- analysis of the public and its geographical distribution,

- its sociological and cultural profile

- analysis of the centres and techniques of distribution.

- A *booking and despatch* service which will carry out orders involving the circulation and maintenance of audio-visual objects.

- A *promotion* service which will apply the directives of the planning and policy bodies directly to each audio visual object. It will use the most modern methods of communication, public relations and cultural stimulus. It will comprise representatives of the Film Making Groups concerned.

This National Distribution Body will be managed by representatives from these fields in the private sector. It will consult specialists in distribution and promotion.

Exhibition

a. The creation of a public sector of cinemas by:

- nationalisation;

- municipalisation;

- construction;

- creation of a fleet of mobile projection units.

This public sector will also play a pilot role.

- ### *b. The move to rationalise programming will come from the Private Sector, which will moreover retain a certain room to manoeuvre through:*

- the right to derogations in justifiable cases;

- the right which each exhibitor will have to use a percentage

of screen time for films of any origin which would not be distributed by the *National Distribution Body*.

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Import Export

The importation and exportation of all audio-visual objects will go through an *Import-Export* Office which will control all transactions and exchanges. It will be empowered to fix reciprocal agreements and quotas.

Relations with the Public

Abolition of censorship as practised at present; its limitation to the safeguarding of the interests of children.

- The notion of censorship will be replaced by that of providing the spectator with objective information;
- The promotion of a new public through the lowering of entrance prices and through various subsidy systems;
- Improvements in amenities, programme alternation, performance times;
- Progressive abandonment of the system of first runs.

Aid for the Public Sector

Over and above a certain ceiling, a part of the profits of a film from the private sector will be reinvested into the Public Sector in the form of co-production.

Relations with ORTF

The Public Sector and Television will together constitute a national audio-visual system.

This system must be directed by three essential principles:

- suppression of all monopoly production;
- free circulation of technicians after salaries have been aligned;
- free circulation of audio-visual objects;

The democratic structure of the Public Sector of the cinema leads naturally to collaboration with television. This collaboration will presuppose:

- autonomy and self-management in television and its independence vis à vis the political and the financial powers;
- increase in the hours of screen time on existing channels;
- a quota reserved for national production;
- the establishment of an agreement on the number of co-productions;
- the creation of a new channel offering an audio-visual outlet to the cinema with preferential screen time for the public sector.

Education

'The full-time student is dead, and so is the evening student. Everyone will study when everyone produces, consumes, works and studies at the same time'. (Sorbonne, Thesis 6, May '68.)

It is therefore up to the students and teachers to find:

- the methods

- 84 – the proportion of practical work
– the form and possibly the conditions for testing knowledge and aptitudes. bearing in mind that creative imagination is not taught. Nevertheless, an introduction to film and, in a more general sense, to the audio-visual arts and techniques, must begin at the primary level of education and be followed through into secondary education.

The teaching of the audio-visual arts and techniques should be open and free of charge. A system of state grants or, better still, a minimum salary should allow people to pursue any studies they feel necessary.

The teaching of the audio-visual arts and techniques will be established through *Workshops* composed of a determined number of students destined for all branches of the film work, actors included.

The structure of these Workshops will flow from the principles regulating the functioning of the Film Making Groups.

These Workshops will be under the direction of a group of officers.

The rotation of specialist officers – directors, writers, technicians, actors – in regular monthly stages will ensure an all-round training in each branch.

The Workshop will have at its disposal film equipment which is constantly adapted to new methods and allows for the production of experimental works which will provide study material; they may also be the object of programmes for distribution.

The Workshop will contribute to the promotion of film culture by its participation in the promotion of the audio-visual arts and in the activities of the film societies.

The Workshop will have free access to the Cinemathèque and to all film screenings.

After a minimum one-year period the students will decide in consultation with their officers on their particular branch of film work; then may enter:

- into paid training periods with the Film Making Groups;
- the Centre for Audio-Visual Education;
- the Research Institute;
- or they may continue for a second year with the same Workshop;
- or possibly transfer to another Workshop.

A surplus of students will automatically constitute a new Workshop. There will be Workshops in all the major cities of the country. In addition – a Centre for Audio-Visual Education will be created. Its functioning will be based on the model of the work groups previously defined.

This Centre will liaise with the Workshops. Workshop members will be able to join the Centre to deepen their technical knowledge. The Centre will keep in constant touch with the work of the Research Institute.

This Centre will be open to all ages and nationalities without reference to any obligatory pre-training.

The Centre's technical training will rest on a series of practical exercises which will provide an active framework within which the students' own interests can emerge.

On leaving the Centre the students may join:

- the Film Making Groups
- Television
- The Workshops
- The Research Institute

The Centre will work to promote the audio-visual field on both the social and professional levels.

Student actors will participate in the practical exercises of the Workshops and the Centre for Audio-Visual Education.

Research

It is clearly essential that a single *Institute for Audio-Visual Research* be created. This is the only way to combat the present sclerosis of the technical means.

The Institute will consist of ten major units:

1. Study and development of processes (laboratory . . . film . . . video . . .)
2. Study and development of the technical material (cameras . . . sound . . . editing . . . electronic equipment . . .)
3. Study and development of the technical means for transmission and projection (exhibition . . . *eidophore* . . .)
4. Technical analysis and development of work places (studio . . . direction . . . television . . .)
5. Methodology (management . . . the work plan . . . promotion . . .)
6. Motivation of the public and study of relations between the audio-visual object and the spectator (psychology . . .)
7. Artistic creativity (this term is used in the broadest sense to cover everything from acting to the most advanced levels of film making)
8. The Institute will take charge of the re-deployment of technicians, the teaching of supervisory techniques and the training of the heads of the Workshops. A minimum salary will be guaranteed.
9. The Institute will be run by an assembly of permanent researchers and will be autonomous and self-managed. Its financing will be ensured by the general Budget and it will not be conceived in terms of commercial viability. This Institute and its officers would be at the disposal of all.

The Technical Industries

- Through a balanced distribution of work among the Production Units, the laboratories and studios would be safeguarded against the vicissitudes of the market.
- The Institute for Audio-Visual Research would extend the benefits

86 of its work to the Technical Industries as a whole.

– Close collaboration will be established between the Technical Industries and the Public Sector whose existence makes possible collaboration on the level of planning.

Financing

The financial structure will be embodied by a *Finance Centre* which will collect directly, and re-distribute all revenues and grants, as well as the *Fonds de Soutien* and loans.

I. Estimated budget for the first year (fixed on 31 May 1968)

a. Costs of operation (in francs):

– General costs of operation (fixed expenses of the different authorities, the Finance Centre and other bodies)	8 million
– Production costs (feature length films and shorts)	100 million
– Exhibition and promotion prints	10 million
– Distribution, and booking and delivery service	8 million
	126 million

b. Costs of creating new structures of cinema:

– Creating booking and despatch service and other bodies	7 million
– Equipment costs (contribution to improvement, purchase and construction of cinemas in the Public Sector, costs of preparing a Cinema City)	20 million
– Research and education	40 million
	127 million

II Financing of the first year of operation

– Allocation to the Public Sector of one part of the <i>Fonds de Soutien au Cinéma</i>	55 million
– Grant from the general national budget	71 million
	126 million

b. Costs of creating structures

– Loan guaranteed by the Government	87 million
– General Budget (cultural affairs, education)	40 million
	127 million

III Basic principles and long-term development

1. As from the second year, the costs shown in the budget (to which outside contributions would be added) will decrease: in fact the contribution from venues would establish a balance by the increase in the production share derived from the creation of booking and despatch services and the decrease in costs of sites.

2. The Government grant will progressively decrease as from the second year but it should continue to guarantee the production of a minimum number of films and the running costs of the Public Sector.
3. This balancing of the system will allow for a Government grant to the Cinema City whose establishment is one of the objects of the Estates General. The City will bring the technical industries and the means of production of the public sector together in a coherent system.
4. The television budget drawn up each year will set aside a sum for transmission of films on television.
5. Orders from the Government and nationalised sectors of the country will be reserved for the Public Sector.
6. The tax on performances will be suppressed: the cinema will be subject to the general system of taxation at a reduced rate.
7. The Public Sector will have a preferential position in relation to the Private Sector but its principles and functioning will not contest the Private Sector's right to achieve a balanced budget or even a profit balance.
8. The provisions foreseen by a given budget will be respected for the duration of its application.
9. The production of the Public Sector will get under way between the second and six month after the system has gone into operation.

After the third session at Suresnes, the Estates General rejected the synthesis project, adopting simply a basis for work which would be the starting point for the definition of any new project for the restructuring of cinema. The text of this motion is as follows:

The Estates General of the Cinema were born of a popular movement of opposition and struggle against the economic, social and ideological order — that of capital protected by the State apparatus.

The Estates General have as their objective to make cultural life and therefore the cinema, an essential part of the life of the nation, that is a public service.

1. The destruction of the monopolies, the creation of a single national body for the distribution and exhibition of films, with direct receipt of box office takings. The creation of a national system of technical processes (laboratories, studios, film stock, etc).
2. Self-management as a method of combating mandarinism, paralysis, and bureaucracy. Officers at all levels will be elected for a limited period, answerable to and revocable by the authorities which elected them.
3. The creation of self-managed production groups which will not be subject to the capitalist profit law.
4. Abolition of censorship.

- 88 5. Integration of training in the audio-visual field into the framework of a revised general education: self-management by pupils and students, access for all social classes.
6. Close links between cinema and a self-managed television, independent of the political and financial powers.

Translated by Diana Matias

young screen 1973



A festival and exhibition of film making by children and young people sponsored by the National Union of Teachers and the British Film Institute and organised in association with the Society for Education in Film and Television.

The National Union of Teachers and the British Film Institute in association with the Society for Education in Film and Television, are pleased to invite teachers and students to provide examples of their film-making activities to be included in a festival and exhibition of film making by children and young people.

The festival and exhibition will be held at the National Film Theatre 1, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1 on Thursday 14 June, Friday 15 June and Saturday 16 June.

Application forms available from SEFT, 63 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PN.

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The theoretical legacy of Dziga Vertov, one of the originators of Soviet documentary cinema, still remains unexplored. This can be explained partially by the silence surrounding his name in Soviet cinema criticism during the second half of his life, from the thirties onwards. In spite of this, Vertov's ideas and discoveries in the theory of cinematography greatly influenced the development of cinema throughout the world.

Vertov's theory of 'cine-eye', his new camera techniques, 'life taken by surprise' method (ie 'candid camera')¹ and his theory of montage were later taken over both by documentary and feature film directors. Unfortunately, even in the twenties, many of his ideas spread without his name being associated with them.

Dziga Vertov (Denis Arkadjevich Kaufman, 1896-1954) was born in Bialystok, Poland. His father was a librarian. Vertov attended a Music Conservatory and later was a student in an Institute of Psychiatry and at Moscow University. As a child he loved literature and wrote adventure novels, sketches and poetry. Vertov dates his fascination with cinema from his early youth when he first thought of the 'possibility of documenting sounds' or 'depicting in words and letters the noise of a waterfall, the sounds of a sawmill and so on'.²

From documenting sounds to documenting life – this was the ambition that led him to cinema.

'One day in spring 1918 – return from a station. In my ears there persisted the gasps and puffing of a departing train. . . . Somebody curses. . . . A kiss. . . . Somebody exclaims. . . . Laughter, a whistle, voices, the station bell, the puffing of a steam engine. . . . Whispers, exclamations, farewells. . . . And walking away I thought: it is necessary to find a machine which will not just describe but register, photograph these sounds. Otherwise one cannot organise or assemble them. They fly as time flies. Perhaps a camera? To record the visual. To organise not the audible world but the visible world? Is that the answer? And at this moment, a meeting with Mikhail Koltzov who offered a job in the cinema'.³

Together with the journalist and writer Mikhail Koltzov, Vertov made documentary films of the Civil War, directing weekly news-reels. He also directed a series of war documentaries: *Battle for Tsaritsyn*, *The Anniversary of the Revolution*, *Mironov's Trial* and others. At the beginning of 1920 Vertov went with Kalinin to the south-east front on VTsIK's⁴ agit-train. The film footage from this

journey formed the basic material for two full-length films, *Agit-train of VTsIK* and *The History of the Civil War*.

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From 1922 onwards Vertov directed regular newsreels called *Kinopravda* (cine-truth). In these he incorporated his new concept of the way in which news should be treated. In an article 'Love for the Living Man', which was published posthumously, he described how this new type of agit cine-periodical was created:

You see, this newsreel was special – it was always moving, it changed from issue to issue. Each *Kinopravda* was different from the previous one. The system of editing changed. The approach to the process of filming changed. The character of the captions and the way in which they were used changed. *Kinopravda* tried to tell the truth using cinematographic means of expression. Slowly but surely the alphabet of film-language was built up in this unusual laboratory. . . . Every day one had to invent something new. There was no-one to learn from. We were exploring unknown ground. Inventing and experimenting, we wrote leading articles, feuilletons, cine-sketches and cine-poems with our film shots. We tried in every way to justify Lenin's faith in documentary cinema: 'The production of new films which are permeated with communist ideas and reflect Soviet reality must begin with making documentaries'.⁵

From then on a group of pupils and followers surrounded Vertov. They called themselves 'Cine-eye'. They shot films, dividing the subject into separate thematic sequences. To them this was 'raw material', which would acquire cinematographic significance in the process of editing.

Vertov's future works form part of the incessant search by Russian artists of the 'twenties for new communist aesthetics. Vertov created new genres of poetic documentary cinema. The basic aim of his films was not only to depict current events in an informative and chronological manner, but, by splicing documentary material, to achieve an association of ideas. In this way he created synthesised, dynamic, cinematographic images which expressed specific social ideas or themes.

Vertov's theory of documentary cinema developed in close association with the political and aesthetic views of Lef, the revolutionary wing of Russian Futurism, led by Mayakovsky. Dziga Vertov belonged to a group of rebellious avant-garde artists who wanted to put their work at the service of the revolution. With Lef, he believed that 'art is not a mirror which reflects the historical struggle, but a weapon of that struggle'.⁶ This led to Lef's theory, of the utilitarian function of art, and the duty of art to fulfil social demands. The awareness that new social situations require new forms of expression made them realise that they had to reappraise their aesthetic values.

Lefists shared the belief of the proletarian writers⁷ that their

92 'creative work should be aimed at forming the psychology and consciousness of their readers towards the communist tasks of the proletariat'.⁸ But they gave it a different interpretation. Unlike the supporters of gradual evolution in the arts, and unlike the proletarian writers, who called for learning from the classics and profound psychological insights in the creation of 'the living man', the Futurists and Lefists followed Mayakovsky's idea of a third revolution – a revolution of the spirit, ie revolution in art itself.⁹ Lefists rejected all art of the past because they believed it was born of aristocratic and bourgeois culture and ideology. According to them classical literature diverts the reader from essential tasks of reality, and provides them with an escape into sterile dreams and superfluous psychological and spiritual experience, and for this very reason it was unsuitable as an efficient weapon in the hands of the proletariat. Instead of manufacturing 'aesthetic hashish', as they called it, they demanded that the centre of literary attention be switched from human emotions to the organisation of society, and thus they insisted on a transfer from literature of the imagination to literature of fact and direct agitation. Thus the main point of disagreement in their controversy with the proletarian writers was the concept of 'how', 'by what means' art should 'form the psychology and consciousness of their readers directed towards the communist tasks of the proletariat'.¹⁰

The specialists will invent a means of getting imaginative exoticism from Party history material, or treat it in say, ancient Roman or Babylonian tones, or even in the Sergievo-suburbs-icon painting style and everyone will feel that art is serving revolutionary construction (well of course, look at the themes, incidents, characters), while in reality art will be serving a philistine escapism from the revolution.¹¹

In their drive to create a new revolutionary art Lefists rejected the impotent pre-war aesthetics, which were appropriate only to serve the corresponding pre-war social purposes. For an innovation in form appropriate to the tasks of socialist construction Tretyakov dismissed the traditionalists' formula 'form/content', 'what/how', since 'the forced pedalling of the "primacy of content" (ie of a completely indeterminate and undifferential phenomenon) was in fact realised in a deterioration in form. The "how" flew up the chimney'.¹² In its place Tretyakov put forward the Lef formula 'material-purpose-form/thing' and 'activation of each part separately'. The new socialist reality required 'an orientation towards the material, a focus on material in its most raw form – the memoir, the diary, sketch, article, outline'.¹³ But by itself raw material can only serve an informative purpose. To make it the mouthpiece of new social and political ideas, ie agitation, it is essential to work out new formal devices to create 'an aggressive class-active art', 'art/life-building, art/activisor, art/agit'.

With this as their aesthetic credo – the fixation of fact and agitation – Lef put the main emphasis in the cinema on the role of the documentary, ie pragmatically orientated, topical agit films, as opposed to so called ‘entertainment’ films or ‘cinematic belle-lettres’.

Dziga Vertov started his work in the cinema by declaring war on feature films – ‘a herd of old-clothesmen, adept at selling their rags’:

WE hereby announce that old films, romanticist, theatricalised, and such like films are leprous.

Do not go near them!

Do not touch them with your eyes!

Beware – danger!

Infectious.

WE affirm the future of cinema by rejecting its present.¹⁴

Vertov made this statement in the first public announcement of his programme, the manifesto ‘WE’, which was published in 1922 in *Kinofot*, the magazine edited by the theoretician of Constructivism, A. Gan. Both the essence and the formulation of this manifesto are reminiscent of the early declarations of the Futurists. Vertov himself said that the manifesto was a re-statement of ideas he had already expressed in 1919 in the *Manifesto on the Disarmament of Theatrical Cinematography*.

Soviet cinema critics usually interpreted Vertov’s total rejection of ‘acted’ films¹⁵ as the protest of a socially-conscious, communist artist against the domination of bourgeois melodrama and American Westerns and thrillers on the Soviet screen. Doubtless this was the position in Soviet cinema at the beginning of the ‘twenties. In the period of NEP¹⁶ commercial cinema immediately became more active and private cinemas opened which wanted to attract the public only for the sake of profit. As a result of their efforts ‘the magnanimous image of the American millionaire-hero glimmered in the stern hearts of the Russian proletariat’.¹⁷ Left-wing artists understood this to be the intensification of the class struggle on the ideological front. This issue evoked a sharp protest from those who worked in both feature and documentary films. A resolution which included this matter was taken at the 12th Congress of the RCP (B) in April, 1923:

During the new economic policy the number of cinemas, the films shown in them and the size of audience grew extensively. Since either old Russian films or films of West European production are shown, the cinema in actual fact propagates bourgeois influence and tends to demoralise the working masses.¹⁸

Even after this resolution most of the money allotted to cinema-

94 tography was spent on making feature films. Documentary cinema was left a purely informative function, or had a subsidiary role in popularising various fields of knowledge.

Soviet documentary film had to wage a long struggle for the right to an independent existence and for the recognition of the intrinsic artistic value of its methods. Clearly in the 'twenties Vertov's rejection of acted films cannot be explained simply by disgust at the trite and the empty. After all, at this time the best films of Soviet directors such as Eisenstein, Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko were being released. In fact, Vertov directed his most violent attacks of that period at the so-called 'intermediate trends' in cinematography, which combined both feature and documentary techniques. Vertov included Sergei Eisenstein's works in this category. He believed that such 'surrogates', 'acted films in documentary trousers', as he called them, constituted the gravest danger to the 'purity of "Cine-eye"'. One ought to look for an explanation of Vertov's rejection of 'acted' cinema in two closely interwoven directions. He fought for the creation of a truly militant and revolutionary cinematic art which would 'explore and scrutinise reality with a film camera':

Our immediate task is to see and hear life, to note its convolutions and its breaks, to catch the crackle of the old bones of life under the press of the Revolution, to watch the young Soviet organism growing, to fix and organise the separate typical phenomena of life in a whole, in essence and in conclusion.¹⁹

Secondly, Vertov committed himself to work out the specific characteristics of cinema as a new medium, possessing its own unique means of expression and sources of influence on the viewer which are present only in cinema and in no other art. 'Everyone who lives his art searches for the essence of its techniques';²⁰ Vertov wrote in 1922. The primary aim of his work was the theoretical analysis and implementation of the most effective means of achieving an impact on a new audience, an audience produced by the revolution.

Reminiscing about his journey with the VTsIK train, Vertov described the reaction of an unsophisticated audience to the agit-material imposed on them:

Not only the painted-up Cossacks depicted on the sides of the train were called 'actors' by the peasants – so were the horses, if only because they were incorrectly shod in the drawing. The more remote the place, the less the peasants tried to grasp the overtly-agit meaning of the drawings. They examined each drawing carefully and each figure separately. Whenever I asked them whether they liked the drawings they would answer: 'We don't know, we are ignorant folk, illiterate'. This, however,

does not prevent the peasants, when talking to one another, from laughing at the horse 'actors' unequivocally.

A Film-Show in a Village

1920. I am a director of a cinema train. We give a performance in a remote station. There is a drama on the screen – Reds and Whites. The Whites drink, dance and kiss their half-dressed women. When they take a break they shoot Red prisoners. The Reds are underground, they are at the front. The Reds fight, conquer, and take all the drunken Whites and their women as prisoners.

The content is all right, otherwise why would they release dramas of the same pattern for the fifth year running? The audience are illiterate or barely literate peasants. They cannot read the titles. They cannot grasp the meaning of the film. They examine separate shots like the pictures on the painted train. Indifference and disbelief. This still unspoiled audience does not understand the conventions of theatricality. 'The madam' remains the madam for them, no matter what peasant clothes she may be shown in. These people are seeing the cinema screen for the first or second time, they still don't understand the taste of 'cine-spirits', and when real peasants appear on the screen after the 'sugary actors' of the drama, they all liven up and try to look behind the screen. A real tractor about which they know only by hearsay crosses the field and ploughs it in a few seconds before the audience's eyes. Chatter, shouts, questions. 'The actors' are forgotten. Now there are real things and people on the screen. There is not a single false theatrical movement to unmask the screen, to remove the peasant's trust. This sharp boundary between the reception of drama and documentary was noticeable whenever a first, second or third film was being shown – everywhere where poison had not yet penetrated deeply, where a demand for the venomous sweetness of fictional drama made up of kisses, sighs and killing had not yet been created.

'Petrushka' or Life

This was at the time when only the outlines of the movement of 'Cine-eye' were drawn, when we had to decide whether we should keep up with feature cinema, and produce 'cinematic spirits' together with the rest of the cinema director's 'brotherhood' – a profitable business and permitted by law – or whether we should declare war on feature films and begin to construct cinematography anew. 'Petrushka' or life?, we asked audiences. 'Petrushka', the hopelessly infected answered. 'We know about life already – we don't need life. Hide life, boring life from us'. 'Life', those who were not hopelessly infected and those who were not at all infected answered. 'We don't

96 know life. We haven't seen life, we've seen our village and ten
verst around. Show us life'.²¹

Thus Vertov believed that one should divide the problem of influencing the viewer into two parts: in the first place, what kind of viewer are we considering, and secondly, what kind of influence do we have in mind. A film based on documentary material has a sobering effect on an audience corrupted by fictional drama, and their taste will inevitably be shocked by the straightforwardness of the film and its unembellished presentation of reality. At the same time, Vertov is convinced that this is the only correct way to the hearts of the illiterate working and peasant masses; 'their education, their habits begin with those things which we show them'.²²

One can, of course, observe in this a naivete and oversimplification of the problem which is typical for the period. It is also partially an attempt to refute the criticism that many of his experiments in form remained unintelligible to the wide masses because of their excessive symbolic complexity.

In the course of his argument against acted films, Vertov compared his own principles of agit based on visual presentation of material with consequent persuasion of the audiences – thus appealing to the consciousness of the audience – to the methods of fictional drama. The latter is mere manipulation of the audience, 'it shows the audience romantic, detective or social "fairy-tales", which are sufficiently skilful and convincing to intoxicate the audience and then to insinuate into his subconscious some thought or idea'.²³

The next stage of Vertov's programme was to free the cinema in its early development from an artistically unjustified synthesis with other forms of art, ie theatre and literature. In his opinion, all feature films were created around a literary skeleton, furnished with cinematic illustrations:

WE clean 'cine-eye' from its hangers-on, music, literature and theatre, we search for our own rhythm, stolen from nowhere, and we find it in the movements of things.

WE invite:

– out –

from the sweet embraces of the romance,
from the venom of the psychological novel,
from the paws of the theatre of lovers,
turn your backs on the music,

– out –

into the open field, into space with four dimensions (3 plus

time), into the search for our own material, our own measure and rhythm.²⁴

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Breaking away from the old cinema which blindly copied the artistic patterns of literature and the theatre, Vertov saw the specific characteristics of the cinema as the dynamics of movement and the ability of the cinema 'to realise the unrealisable in life'. This made it essential to create an alphabet of cinema-language – a system of signs which would organise 'the chaos of objects moving in space' on the screen. Out of this the idea of 'Cine-eye' developed – Vertov's complex theory of cinema.

Vertov sees innate possibilities in the film camera of a fundamentally new perception of the world, hitherto unknown to man. Until now the film camera was completely subordinate to the human eye, copying its work and 'the better the copying, the more highly was the shot considered'.²⁵ But man's eye is imperfect. The film camera, whose technical possibilities of 'seeing' can be perfected without limit, must come to the help of the human eye and enable it 'to see the invisible', and to bring order to the chaos of visual phenomena surrounding it. Thus, for example, the spectator at a boxing match or ballet haphazardly moves his eyes from the whole group to separate faces, separate movements. With the help of the film camera, the 'cine-eye', the eyes of the spectator can be moved consecutively onto those details or those moments of action which it is essential to see:

I am the cinema-eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, can show you the world as only I can see it. From to-day I liberate myself forever from human immobility. *I am in perpetual motion*, I approach and move away from objects, I creep up to them, I climb onto them, I move alongside the muzzle of a running horse, I tear into the crowd at full speed, I run before the fleeing soldiers, I tip over onto my back, I ascend with aeroplanes, I fall and rise together with falling and rising bodies.

Here am I, the camera, rushing about guided by a resultant force, manoeuvring in the chaos of motions, fixing motion from motion in the most complex combinations. Freed from the obligation of 16-17 frames a second, freed from the limits of time and space, *I can contrast any points in the universe*, wherever I might fix them.

My way leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world. And this is how I can decipher a new world unknown to you.²⁶

In this direction one of the first of Vertov's experiments was to achieve slow motion on the screen, using a 'rapid eye', (running the camera abnormally fast during shooting). His camera-man, Kaufman, filmed Vertov jumping from a building in a Moscow

98 yard. When the film is projected onto a screen one can follow the changes in feelings and expressions on the jumping man's face. Thereafter the 'rapid-eye' was enriched by a whole series of camera techniques. At the same time Vertov broke with the existing convention of obligatory motivation of montage development of perspective. It was considered that a given cinematic event should be provided with an appropriate cause. Thus a shot taken from above could only be shown on the screen if it was preceded by a shot of a man looking down from above. Vertov, without any warning, unexpectedly inserts close-up shots of faces, of objects filmed from strange angles. In order to achieve the most vivid impressions, he fought the existing perception of things, trying to violate the current canons of cinema, to turn and present phenomena from a new point of view. In this way, liberated from spatial and temporal limits, 'the cine-eye' fixes living phenomena on the film. Its work is aided by the cineaste/pilot, the cineaste/engineer 'who afterwards edits the documentary material caught on film'. 'Cine-eye' = cine-see (to see through the film camera) + cine-write (to write on the film with a camera) + cine-assemble (to create a montage).²⁷ 'The result of this sort of combined action of the liberated and perfected camera, and of the strategic brain of man directing, observing and taking stock of things, is a noticeably fresher, and therefore more interesting, presentation of even the most ordinary things'.²⁸

Vertov defines different camera techniques – slow motion, filming with a moving camera – tracking shot, filming from unexpected angles, with a hidden camera, filming when the subject's attention is distracted, 'candid camera', running the sequence backwards ('the negative of time'), animated stills, micro- and macro-filming, X-ray filming, etc as 'microscope and telescope of time' as 'the possibility of seeing without boundaries and limits', as 'the possibility to make the invisible visible, the vague clear, the hidden apparent, to unmask the disguised, to expose the acting in life, to turn lies into truth, ie cinema-truth (that is the truth extracted by means of cinematography, by means of the "cine-eye"'.²⁹

In his work Vertov paid much attention to filming unawares and 'candid camera' especially when depicting human behaviour. This often required special technical equipment – 'invisible cameras, super-sensitive films, flashlight cameras, films for night time and also soundless cameras (vision plus sound), the perpetual readiness of the camera to film instantaneously'.³⁰

In one of his speeches in 1929 Vertov recalled how, during the shooting of someone else's film, he would film the actors at the very moment the other director stopped filming. The actors were still totally involved in their roles but they had already stopped 'acting'. Later it turned out that Vertov's shots were much more authentic than those taken by the other director.

To remove man's mask and expose the discrepancy between

words and thoughts in real life the camera must penetrate reality at those moments when man completely reveals himself. Only then will the film camera succeed in pinning down the truth, instead of presenting a performance as if it were the true behaviour of man. When Vertov read about a bank cashier who turned out to be a thief, he made the following comment in his diary: 'If cinema-truth is the truth shown by means of "cine-eye", a shot of the cashier will be true to "cine-eye" only if his mask is removed and behind it one can see the thief'.³¹

Vertov regarded the 'slices of life' caught on film as a kind of 'raw material', which was as necessary to the documentary film director as a note-book to a writer or sketches to a painter:

Kinopravda is made from material in the same way as a house is made from bricks. One can build a stove or the Kremlin wall and many other things from bricks. And from film material one can construct various cine-things. Just as good bricks are needed for a house, good film material is required to assemble cine-things. This entails a serious approach to documentary shots – the factory of cine-material, where life comes through the camera-lens and does not disappear forever without a trace, but leaves an exact and inimitable record.³²

One must handle this extracted material with care and respect – it is the irreplaceable witness of time. For this purpose he proposed that special documentary laboratories be formed – 'factories of facts' – stores of documentary films in which raw material, the product of enormous labour, would be kept catalogued according to chronology and subject matter. Unused film footage is not waste – it is the artist's raw material for future films.

Vertov's way of working on documentaries often evoked attacks and criticism as the recording of the accidental taken at random from life. The critics rebuked him for not working from a film-script, not realising that Vertov's method consisted in 'the assembling of slices of life towards a theme, and not the reverse'.³³ Thus instead of selecting shots according to an *a priori* elaborated plan, Vertov's system was to observe and record life 'just as it is', and only then to draw conclusions from his observations. Vertov explained that writing a scenario for a documentary film is like writing an account of living conditions of the unemployed before these conditions have been investigated. In this case one can only outline an approximate plan of action. This kind of preparatory plan is usually the first step in Vertov's multi-stage system of montage. 'Cine-eye' theory understands montage in the broad sense of the word – as the whole process of producing a film, from the moment of choosing a subject to the release of the film onto the screen. It begins with thorough research of all documentary material related to the chosen subject: manuscripts, books, newspaper clippings, photographs or bits of film already made. On the

100 basis of all this material a selection is made of the most valuable data to create the outline of the theme. This is not a static plan – it develops and changes in the process of further work. It is constantly measured against the reality, which it should reflect. It is in constant interaction with current events, which cannot be foreseen: 'It is not enough to film slices of truth. One must assemble these slices so that *the whole* also represents the truth'.³⁴

The 'cine-eye' theory presupposes six consecutive stages of montage:

1. montage during observation – the orientation of the naked eye in any place at any time;
2. montage after observation – the mental organisation of what has been seen on the basis of its characteristic features;
3. montage during filming – the orientation of the camera-eye in the place investigated in point 1; adaptation to new conditions;
- 4 montage after filming – a rough editing of the film according to its basic features. Determining what bridging shots are required;
5. estimation on sight (the hunt for missing sequences) – the instantaneous orientation in any visual circumstances to catch the necessary bridging shots. Extreme attentiveness. Military drill – estimation on sight, speed, attack;
6. final montage – the discovery of minor hidden themes amongst the major ones. The reorganisation of all the material in the best order. The discovery of the pivot of the cine-thing. Co-ordination of similar shots and, finally, the mathematical calculation of montage sequences.³⁵

The last three stages represent montage proper – editing. This means that every shot, every film scene acquires a distinct artistic expression and a particular significance only in combination with other shots. The difference between a film still and a photograph is that whereas the latter is a thing in itself, the former is a sign which functions only in the system of signs of cinema-language. The specific characteristic of cinema and the origin of its impact on the viewer lies not in the content of given shots, but in the combination of these shots in montage or editing. Vertov based his system of editing on a theory of intervals, ie, the replacement of one shot by another, the way two shots are spliced together. In his manifesto *WE* he explained that the 'cine-eye' method is the art of organising essential movements of objects in space, the search for 'the inner rhythm of every object':

The material – the elements of the art of movement – is the intervals (the replacement of one movement by another) and not the movement itself. They (the intervals) lead the action to its cinematic resolution. The organisation of movement is the organisation of its elements, ie, the organisation of the intervals

into phrases. Every phrase has its rise, its plateau and its fall (which are obvious to a certain degree). A whole work is constructed from phrases, just as phrases are constructed from intervals of movement.³⁶

Later Vertov developed this theory, giving a more detailed description of the way in which one shot is to be replaced by another, one visual impression by another and of the rules of organising shots amongst themselves: The editor must take the following interrelationships into account:

1. the interrelationship of close-up and distant shots;
2. the interrelationship of angles;
3. the interrelationship of movements within a shot;
4. the interrelationship of light and shade;
5. the interrelationship of film speeds.

Depending on the combination of these interrelationships, the editor determines: 1. The order of sequences; 2. The duration of each sequence (in metres, in frames), ie the time each separate shot is seen. At the same time, apart from movement between shots (intervals), between two sequential shots, one must consider the visual relationship of each separate shot to all the other shots which take part in the 'montage battle'. The editor's most difficult and most important task is to find the most strategic route for the eyes of the viewer amongst all the interactions, interattractions and interrepulsions of the shots.³⁷

Vertov's experimental work in editing overlapped with the previous and simultaneous discoveries of directors of acted cinema, like Kuleshov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin. At that time it was already known that montage creates the possibility of parallel and simultaneous actions – that is, that actions can occur in different parts of the world and at different times and yet in the film they would be gathered together.

From opening windows, people looking out of them, galloping cavalry, signals, little boys running, water spouting from a blown-up dam, the even steps of the infantry, one can edit the celebration, let us say, of the construction of a power station, and the occupation of a peaceful town by the enemy.³⁸

Although these devices were already widely used in feature films for different purposes and in different combinations, such 'tricks' were inconceivable in documentaries. E. Svilova, Vertov's wife, assistant and editor of all his films, applying to join the 'cine-eye' group in 1924, said: 'I can state with assurance that no one has paid any attention to documentaries. In my opinion it has never even entered the head of a single director that documentary material can be edited into montage, that documentary material is life'.³⁹

Vertov enriched existing cinematic technique and interpreted it in an original way, and he was the first director in Russia to use it in documentaries. He wanted his films, which were constructed from documentary material, to function not as a mere reflection of reality, but as its conscious interpretation by cinematographic means. To this end he considered it artistically justifiable to introduce new spatial and temporal relations into documentaries. For example, in one of his early works, the 13th issue of *Kinopravda*, in honour of the 5th anniversary of the October revolution, he created, by means of montage, a synthesised cinematic image – the funeral of revolutionary heroes who had died in the fight for Soviet power: on the screen one sees the burial of men killed at Astrakan (taken in 1918), graves are filled up in Kronstadt (taken in 1921), the guns fire in memory of the soldiers who fell in Petrograd (1920), Muscovites stand silently with bared heads on the banks of the Moskva river (1922).⁴⁰ In the same way the scene of drunken women dancing was created in the film *Cine-Eye* – it was assembled from footage shot in different villages at different times. The cross-cutting technique allows the artist to achieve a convincing synthesised impression of an event, or a synthesised image of a person, combining the features of many different people. In *The Lullaby* the mother rocking her baby who is the narrator of the film turns, in the course of the film, into a Spanish, a Ukrainian, a Russian and an Uzbek mother. All the same, it is as if there was one mother in the film. The image of the mother is divided amongst several faces. The image of the little girl in this film is also formed from the images of a series of faces. 'It is not a mother who is before us – but the Mother, not a little girl – but the Girl. . . . One can really understand this only directly from the screen. Not a man – but Man!' ⁴¹

Vertov also used elements of photo-montage, paralleling work in this field by the Soviet artist Rodchenko, and John Heartfield in Germany. The technique of photo-montage was aimed at showing either simultaneous actions, or at singling out details from the general picture or was used to bring together and contrast two or more facts.

Vertov not only ignored chronological order from time to time, but in some of his works he preferred poetical connections (relational editing) to logical ones, in order to make a stronger intellectual or emotional impact. In order to define their artistic function and significance, the examples of such connections would have to be examined in the context of the film in which they appear, bearing in mind the characteristics of the specific genre (a topic vast enough to require a separate article). One should also remember that Vertov always insisted that his method was that of the communist artist, and was different from the objectivist approach to documentary material: 'We are here to serve a specific class – workers and peasants. . . . We are here to show

the world as it is and to explain the bourgeois structure of the world to the workers'.⁴² The director explained many scenes in his films by his wish 'to open the eyes of the people to the connection between social and visual phenomena'.⁴³ He gave this as an explanation, for example, of the episodes in the film 'Cine-eye', when a loaf of bread turns back into rye and a joint of meat turns back into a cow. 'By revealing the origin of objects and bread the camera graphically demonstrates to every worker that he himself produces everything and consequently, that they belong to him'.⁴⁴

In his time Vertov's work was often criticised for such free interpretation of documentary material, which led to a distortion of fact. A controversy about the permissible degree of subjective interpretation of factual material by an artist appeared in the pages of *Lef*. It was primarily concerned with *Lef's* attitude towards acted/unacted films. Tretyakov questioned whether Vertov's films could be called pure documentary: 'Pure documentary is the editing of facts simply in terms of the actuality and social significance. When a fact becomes a brick in a construction of a different kind – the pure documentary concept disappears, everything depends on the montage'.⁴⁵ The literary critic, script-writer and theoretician of Formalism, Viktor Shklovsky, also reproached Vertov for violating the laws of documentary cinema. In an article 'Where is Dziga Vertov going?', he wrote: 'Documentary films require titles, dates. . . . Dziga Vertov cuts documentary films. In this respect his work is artistically not progressive. . . . I want to know the number of that steam engine which lies on its side in Vertov's picture'.⁴⁶ Vertov answered his critics, insisting on the right of documentary films to function not as 'documentary minutes', but to analyse and synthesise facts. There is no doubt that all the data concerning material which has been filmed should be kept in a film library. It should be available to directors, 'it should serve as a valid documentation for the editor, as a guide for the correct montage route'. 'But this does not mean, of course, that the editor is obliged to present all this data in his films as an appendix to each shot'.⁴⁷

In this controversy a certain lack of appreciation and under-estimation of Vertov's innovations was apparent. This innovation manifested itself, apart from his other achievements, in his elaboration and creation of new genres of documentary films. The variety of genres in his work can be seen even in the titles and subtitles of some of his films. *The Anniversary of the Revolution* (historical documentary); *The opening of the Tomb of Sergii Radonezhsky* (cine-sketch); *Agit-train of VTsIK* (film journey); *Lenin's Kino-pravda* (Cine-poem); *Man with a Movie Camera* (cine feuilletton); *Cine-eye* (candid camera); *Symphony of the Donbass*; *Three songs of Lenin*. Thus it is obvious that Vertov did not confine himself to methods of reportage, but interpreted the concept of documen-

104 tary more widely. His experiments in form always originated from the specific characteristics of the genre chosen. In this connection, it is worth looking at the film *Man with a Movie Camera*, which suffered the sharpest attacks of the critics for its excessive use of formalist devices. But if it seems that the means are more transparent in this film than the aim, it is only because Vertov wished to acquaint the viewer with the means, to expose all the technical devices known to him which are conventionally hidden. He maintained that while working on this particular film, he had the following intention: 'in our . . . garden we grow different fruit, different films. Why shouldn't we make a film about cinema-language, the first film without words, requiring no translation into other languages, an international film?'⁴⁸ At the same time, he tried in the same way to show the behaviour and actions of a man with a film camera in different situations. That role was 'played' by Vertov's brother, camera-man Michael Kaufman. Vertov always regarded this work as the creation of 'film-producing films'. He ascribed his later artistic achievements, which were acknowledged by the critics, to the discoveries which arose out of this experimental film. He maintained that the critics who praised some of his films highly, while slating others, failed to appreciate the intrinsic relationship between such films as *Cine-eye* (candid camera) and *Kinopravda* (newsreel).

There is no such thing as 'cine-eye' for the sake of 'cine-eye', 'candid camera' for the sake of 'candid camera' or hidden cameras for the sake of hidden cameras. This is not a programme, it is the means. *Kinopravda*, which was accepted by critics, was made by means of 'cine-eye'.⁴⁹

And 'cine-eye', Vertov said, involves 'every cinematic technique, every cinematic invention, every device and method which helps one to discover and show the truth'.⁵⁰

Clearly, the turning point in Vertov's life and career in the mid-thirties, when he was no longer allowed to make his own films (his last independent film *Lullaby* was released in 1937), can largely be attributed to changes in Soviet cultural policy, ie tighter control by increasingly bureaucratised administrative bodies over all artistic activity in the country. All the artistic groups of the twenties were now dissolved and replaced by Unions of Writers, Film Workers, etc. Artists of different outlooks and aesthetic trends were now to be united under centralised leaderships.

There was no room left for the genuine and stimulating controversy among Soviet artists so characteristic of the twenties. Together with other outstanding masters of the Soviet cinema Dziga Vertov had to defend his artistic methods against charges of formalism.

After continually failing to get approval for a number of his

own projects, Vertov ended up working as a newsreel editor – an activity which by then offered no scope for the experimentation characteristic of his early years. 105

Unfortunately even now many Soviet cinema critics and film directors tend to explain Vertov's silence in the last two decades of his life as 'a creative crisis'. Vertov, they speculate, ran out of ideas, his narrow mechanical conception of montage was no longer fitted to cope with the growing demands of the day. . . .

Vertov's diary sheds some light on the atmosphere which surrounded him at the time: ' . . . 100 per cent frost of distrust from the army of distributors, 100 per cent frost from those at the top of the administrative ladder '.⁵¹

Relentless public denunciations, bureaucratic arbitrariness, deliberate dispersal of the ' cine-eye ' team, and gossip, were eventually too much for him. In his diary for 1945 Vertov rejoices at the republication of Mayakovsky's work and then adds bitterly:

It is a good thing that he was not a film director. A film cannot be preserved in manuscript. Originals don't exist. Working copies are mutilated. Unreleased films are either stolen in bits and pieces or die unknown at one stage or another. The idea, the treatment, the script is the only surviving copy of the film.⁵²

A man of rare consistency and principle, Vertov refused to compromise in his work:

If an artist is so hungry for creative work that he can no longer sustain the torture of waiting, the torture of standing idle, and if he then shamefacedly agrees to make a film in obviously hopeless conditions – he makes a mistake. . . .

I, myself, am terribly hungry for work. This is an artist's hunger, of course. Food wanders around me, surrounds me. If I depended only on a pen and paper, I would write endlessly, day and night. But I have to write with a movie camera, write, not on paper but on film. My work depends on a whole series of organisational and technical factors.

I must win my rights in my work. And if I cannot get anything from this administration, or that governing body I will still not surrender. Don't we all remember what Mayakovsky said in a similar situation: ' Governing bodies come and go, art remains '.⁵³

Notes

1. This term seems to me a more accurate translation of the Russian 'zhizn' vrasplokh', ie filming of 'life as it is' than 'life slap-up' previously used in *Screen* (Winter 1971/72 v12 n4).

2. Vertov, D. *Statii, Dnevniki, Zamysly, Izd. Iskusstvo*, Moscow 1966, p73. This is the only existing collection which contains in a chronological order some of Vertov's articles and speeches (part I), excerpts from his diaries (part II) and scripts and treatments for his films. Edited and with an introduction by S. Drobashenko, the collection systematises the evolution of Vertov's ideas of documentary cinema as well as highlighting many important aspects of his personality, life, conditions of work and professional experience. There is also a monograph in Russian by N. P. Abramov, *Dziga Vertov*, Moscow, 1962; translated into Italian (Rome, 1964) and French (Lyon, 1965) with the same title. Both books have Vertov's filmography.
At present Vertov's widow, E. Svilova is preparing for publication in Moscow recollections of Vertov by his friends and colleagues.
3. *Op cit* Vertov, I, p73.
4. VTsIK – *Vserossiiskij (Vsesojuznyj) Tsentral'nyj Ispolnitel'nyj Komitet* or All-Russian (All-Union) General Executive Committee, VTsIK was the central executive committee of the Congress of Soviets, All-Russian for the RSFSR, All-Union for the USSR from 1923. Its 200-300 members were elected by the Congress of Soviets and delegated with supreme by the latter when it was not in session. In fact central executive power quickly passed to Sovnarkom, the much smaller Council of People's Commissars. (Editor's Note.)
5. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p157. For Lenin's ideas about cinema see *Samoe vazhnoe iz vseh iskusstv*, Moscow 1963, p123.
6. Mayakovsky, V. *Polnoye Sobranie Sochinennii*, Vol 12, Goslitizdat, Moscow 1957-1961, p65.
7. The writers united around a literary magazine *Na Postu (On Guard)* known later by the name of their organisation RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers).
8. *Lef*, 1923, No 4, p4.
9. Due to a confusion in polemics at that time it should perhaps be noted that the proletarian writers also called for revolution in literature, but they understood it not aesthetically, but as 'proletarianisation' of literature. The new revolutionary literature of the working classes should be created by the proletariat itself, of which they considered themselves the representatives. For O Brik, one of the main theoreticians of *Lef*, proletarian art was not art for the proletariat or art of the proletariat, but art created by an artist with talent and a proletarian consciousness.
10. See note 7.
11. Tretyakov, 'We Raise the Alarm', *New Lef*, No 2, 1927, quoted in *Screen Winter 1971/2*, v12, n4, p68.
12. *Ibid*, p72.
13. *Ibid*, p72.
14. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p45.
15. This is a literal translation of the term originally used in Russian to denote scripted and acted films as opposed to documentary films based on actual events.
16. *Novaja Ekonomicheskaja Politika* or New Economic Policy was the name quickly adopted for the series of economic measures proposed by Lenin at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) which served as guidelines for Soviet economic policy until 1928. The ad hoc centralisation of industry, militarisation of labour and direct requisitioning of grain surpluses adopted during the period of civil war and foreign intervention was replaced by a policy of developing the productive forces of the Soviet Union by encouraging trade, restoring the labour market and taxing the

peasantry, thus promoting centralisation and economic growth without destroying the alliance of proletariat and peasantry. (Editor's Note.) 107

17. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p77.
18. 'O partiinoi i sovietskoi pečati', *Sbornik Dokumentov*, Moscow, 1954, p275.
19. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p153.
20. *Ibid*, p47.
21. *Ibid*, pp89-91.
22. *Ibid*, p91.
23. *Ibid*, p92.
24. *Ibid*, p46.
25. *Ibid*, p53.
26. *Ibid*, p55, quoted in *Screen*, Winter 1971/72, v12 n4, pp55-56.
27. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p111.
28. *Ibid*, p56, quoted in *Screen*, Winter 1971/72, v12, n4, p57.
29. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p143.
30. *Ibid*, pp197-8.
31. *Ibid*, p197.
32. *Ibid*, p78.
33. *Ibid*, p77.
34. *Ibid*, p135.
35. *Ibid*, p97.
36. *Ibid*, p48.
37. *Ibid*, p114.
38. Kuleshov, Lev. *Iskusstvo Kino*, Tea-Kinopečati, 1929, p161.
39. *Lef*, 1924, No 4.
40. The footage Vertov used in this issue of *Kinopravda* was not shot by his camera-men. The film consisted of three parts: the first – the October parade and workers demonstration in Moscow 1922. The second – a flashback into the five years which had elapsed since the revolution – assembled from various documentary films of the Civil War, war communism, post-war reconstruction and the first year of NEP. The third part was devoted to the first achievements of the Soviet Republic – electrification, a new radio station, the first tractors.
41. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p160.
42. *Ibid*, p98.
43. *Ibid*, p69.
44. *Ibid*, p69.
45. *New Lef*, No 11-12, 1927, quoted in *Screen*, *op cit*, p74.
46. *Sovietsky Ekran*, 1926, No 32.
47. Vertov, D. *Op cit*, p87.
48. *Ibid*, p158.
49. *Ibid*, p137.
50. *Ibid*, p75.
51. *Ibid*, p166.
52. *Ibid*, p263.
53. *Ibid*, p187.

Bill Nichols*

This is an extract from a thesis on the American newsreel

As early as 1925 there was agitation in America for a radical film-making unit. Willi Muenzenberg wrote in the July 23 *Daily Worker*: 'We must develop the tremendous cultural possibilities of the motion picture in a revolutionary sense'. But the Hollywood film remained dominant and it was not until 1928 that oppositional groups actually took shape. The first such group of major significance was The Workers Film and Photo League of America. *Experimental Cinema*, a magazine devoted to film theory and the Soviet film, quoted from its founding principles:

The movie must become our weapon. It must spread the message of struggle against unemployment, starvation, and police clubbings. It must reflect the workers' lives and problems. [The League had three points of emphasis] . . . to struggle against and expose the reactionary film . . . to produce documentary film reflecting the lives and struggles of the American worker . . . to spread and popularise the great artistic and revolutionary Soviet production.¹

The Film and Photo League was conceived as part of an international worker's cinema movement. Bela Belasz and Leon Mousinac were leading figures in this movement, both men more directly involved in film theory than political action, and the Cinema Bureau of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theater, centred in Moscow, provided many of the broad, ideological directives. The Bureau's emphasis was on mass work (base building) – opposing bourgeois or fascist films through demonstrations, short articles or audience discussions while also 'popularising all revolutionary films.'² Of particular significance was the Bureau's contextual focus; films were only the hub around which organising and political consciousness-raising could revolve. They noted that documentary films 'must be accompanied by a lecture,' that revolutionary films should have an introduction and that bourgeois newsreels required analysis to expose their suppositions.³ Their policies seemed to assume that the political leader or organiser need only give out correct analysis to his attentive audience for that analysis to be adopted by all. There also seemed to be an assumption that worker's newsreels need only portray the labour movement honestly, showing the realities of proletarian life, in order to be valuable organising tools. During the 30s, though, the latter assumption was the prevailing

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one and there was reason to believe it a valid one: proletarian life had disappeared from the screen to a large degree (see either Rotha's or Jacob's history of the American film during this period) and those who did portray it could very likely use that act as the basis for alliance. There was less concern with building a united front around specific contradictions than with fostering a general sense of class consciousness.

The Worker's Film and Photo League both organised protest against reactionary films (most notably the Nazi import, *S.S. Mann Brand*)⁴ and undertook newsreel production. The degree to which the League was a worker's organisation in fact is not clear; among its claimed advisors or associates were: Margaret Bourke-White, Ralph Steiner, Elia Kazan, Elmer Rice, Burgess Meredith, James Cagney and Slavko Vorkapich.⁵ It seemed more a part of the intellectual and artistic enchantment with the Russian experiment than a genuinely proletarian movement but its films were decidedly working class in their orientation. A partial list of the League's films give some indication of their emphasis: *

Film and Photo League films

Newsreels

Detroit Ford Massacre

Hunger March – 1931, 1932

Hunger – 1932

California – 1934

Bonus March

May Day – ca. 1934

The Scottsboro Boys

Sheriffed

East Side, West Side

Farmer's March

Marine Strike

United Front

The World Today – a newsreel series with issues on the Black Legion and evictions.

Workers Struggle in New York – 1932, 1933

Cotton-Picker's Strike – 1933

Western Pennsylvania and Kentucky Miner's Strike

Washington Farmer's Convention – 1934

Tom Mooney Run – 1934

San Diego Police Attack on Workers

New York's Hooverilles – 1932

The City of Contrasts

Documentaries

Ernest Thaelmann

* Compiled from correspondence with Tom Brandon and reports in *New Theater*, *New Masses* and *Experimental Cinema* magazines.

Millions for US
Pie in the Sky
The Land of the Free – 1934
Sweet Land of Liberty
Imperial Valley – 1934
Misery among Working Class Children – 1934
Taxi – a feature length film

The New York branch served as the actual headquarters, producing the bulk of the films and most of the leadership with the Los Angeles branch as a weak second. There were, however, active branches in numerous other cities including Detroit, Hollywood, Chicago, Boston and San Francisco. To what degree these chapters succeeded in distributing these films and with whom they worked most closely cannot be ascertained with certainty. Tom Brandon reported in *New Theater*, however, that a San Francisco Film and Photo League member had been jailed for 'showing movies to the agricultural workers. What movies? *Road to Life* and newsreels of last summer's Cotton-Picker's Strike.'⁶ And a subsequent *New Theater* editorial noted that *Mother*, *Potemkin*, *War against the Centuries* and Film and Photo League newsreels had been shown to farmers in scattered Minnesota farm towns.

New Theater itself was called the 'Organ of the League of Worker's Theaters, Film and Photo Leagues, and Worker's Dance Leagues.' Its editor, Herbert Kline, later became involved in several important documentaries such as *Heart of Spain*, *Return to Life*, *Crisis* (1938), *Lights out in Europe* (1939) and *Forgotten Village* (1941). The magazine reflected the great cultural upheaval that the Depression had precipitated and the various art groups represented the American left's commitment to a progressive solution (at the time even Unemployment Insurance was labelled a Communist plot).⁷ Ralph Steiner called for revolutionary films that would 'clearly and forcefully reflect and direct the class struggle.'⁸ Leo Hurwitz argued that, 'We must think of our films as having the same capacity as union organisers . . . we are handling a very important political weapon, more effective at this time than carloads of bullets and machine guns,'⁹ an elaboration of a claim by Sergei Eisenstein that, 'Perhaps for the first time in history, the film has become as terrible a weapon as the hand grenade.'¹⁰

Much of the enthusiasm surrounding revolutionary films had to do with the development of a film theory to unify them. The Cinema Bureau's contextual emphasis on presentation and political organisation stirred less excitement than the challenge to forge new aesthetic principles for revolutionary film-making. Like Vertov's, much of this theory was conditioned by a great abhorrence of the Hollywood dream factory. Any attempt to apply fictional techniques was justified mainly in terms of how it would enhance the news-

reel or documentary. Some writers went as far as Vertov in demanding purely documentary techniques, warning that any fusion would 'find "the sensation of reality" irreparably damaged.'¹¹ Others began to distinguish documentary and fiction by the relationship of shots to each other and to the actual world in order to fuse them in a more principled manner. Leo Hurwitz, for example, argued that documentary film is based on 'the creative comparison, contrast or opposition of shots, externally related to each other, to produce an effect not contained in any one of the shots' (contrasted to fiction's 'internal montage' where shots referred primarily to each other rather than the external world).¹² But, just as this approach echoed Eisenstein's montage theories, so it diverged from Vertov-like separatism concluding with a call for 'a mixed form of the synthetic documentary and the dramatic film [where] the greatest task is to make the camera eloquent.'¹³

The latter route seemed to become the most travelled one as the Workers Film and Photo League's leading figures began to make personal, imaginative documentaries in the late '30s and '40s. Ralph Steiner's comment that the filmmaker must always remember, 'There is no art without propaganda [and that] there can be no effective propaganda without good art,'¹⁴ became the kind of watchword that propelled the League's artists to dissect the filmmaking problems. Perhaps they felt securely lodged within a mainstream of oppositional politics with greater aesthetic and technical mastery as the primary impediments to further achievement. Steiner, among others, recognised that 'a muddy political viewpoint will result in muddy technique' but his stress, like Vertov's, Eisenstein's – in fact, like all the Russian film theorists – was on perfecting film techniques that could make the cinema a potent weapon. The political contribution to 'clear images' was generally acknowledged but seldom analysed.

The League's members were capable of recognising their shortcomings, but the determination to overcome them does not appear to have been a priority. Leo Hurwitz noted:

Paradoxically, our main weakness has been *too little propaganda*. To a class-conscious worker, for example, our May First reels, which show hundreds of thousands of workers mobilised in the streets, may be a source of inspiration and a stimulus to militancy, but to a non-revolutionary worker, unless we clearly and effectively dramatise why those thousands are marching, May Day is another parade of marching, marching, marching . . . [Our films] *assume* the revolutionary approach, instead of *convincing* the spectator of its correctness.¹⁵

A *New Theater* editorial spelled out these faults even more bluntly:

1. Too much schematism and sloganism; low artistic technique, inability to express political tasks through artistic images, etc.

- 112 2. Theoretical and political backwardness; lack of knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and consequent inability to solve problems facing revolutionary art.
3. Organisational work lagging behind political work and the influence of the movement on the masses.¹⁸

Hurwitz saw this problem exacerbated by 'the mechanical, schematic and unexperimental approach to the search for the proper forms for the revolutionary movie' and a general insistence on 'the documentary form as the only true one.'¹⁷ Hurwitz's critique represented a radical shift for a man who only a few months before had praised League newsreels because 'a strike, demonstrations or hunger march is shown with the full brutalities of the police, with the full heroism and militancy of the workers, without the destructive mocking command of the bourgeois announcer.'¹⁸ The euphoria of active opposition seemed to leave most of the members vulnerable to a sense of disenchantment after it wore off. Their response was to try to hone the rough edges from their craftsmanship rather than to strengthen their political scaffolding. The tendency may be an early indication of why Newsreel members assert that it is easier for a political activist to become a filmmaker than for a filmmaker to become a political activist.

In September 1935 members of The Workers Film and Photo League merged with Nykino, an artist's workshop aligned with the left to form the New Film Alliance. This organisation was fairly shortlived, however, and in March 1937 it was superseded by Frontier Films. A lengthy report in *The Nation* describes the new film group as 'the same group, who several years ago, organised the Film and Photo League'¹⁹ but the prefix 'Workers' had now been dropped from the new group's title and the participants seemed to be exclusively filmmakers of some note.* Frontier Films hoped to be an alternative to March of Time which they believed failed to 'deduce pace and drama out of the real scene and the real protagonists.'²⁰ Paul Strand announced as their goal: '[to] devise legitimate techniques for moving an audience by projecting the basic dramatic meanings implicit in the documents.'²¹

Several films that still stand as honoured examples of the documentary form were distributed or produced under Frontier Film's auspices including *Spanish Earth*, *China Strikes Back*, *White Flood*, *United Action*, and the group's most touted work, *Native Land* by

* Among those who were either colleagues or advisors were: John Howard Lawson, Elia Kazan, Leo Hurwitz, Herbert Kline, Ralph Steiner, Joris Ivens, Vera Caspay, David Wolff, Malcom Cowley, John Dos Passos, Lillian Hellman, Archibald MacLeish, Lewis Milestone and Clifford Odets. (From Ben Belitt, 'The Camera Reconnoiters, *The Nation*, 11/20/37, p 557.)

Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz.* In 1943 the group disbanded, as did several audience societies designed to support these efforts. The war had begun, the economy had overcome its most desperate contradictions and virtually all Americans had gathered around the banner of Anti-Nazism, if not Anti-Fascism. The reverberations of protest and hard careful looks at who profited from the three years of war died to little more than weak tremors in the post-war period when anti-Communism became a divisive ploy potent enough to aid in splintering the powerful Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) from within.²²

Meanwhile a film movement that had begun as a radical alternative to the Hollywood product found itself drifting towards rapprochement. In 1934 just before its demise, The Film and Photo League helped form the Harry A Potamkin Film School in New York.²³ Its purpose was to serve as a workers' film school by teaching the history, development and craft of the motion picture. A heavy emphasis was given to the Soviet film and to the principle of teaching the practical aspects of filmmaking – camera, lighting, etc. There were plans to produce a documentary co-operatively (*Waste and Want*) and, like Frontier Films, the school lasted into the forties.

What became of its student/workers, however, is not clear. If they followed the footsteps of their mentors many no doubt found their way back beneath the broad mantle of the Hollywood industry. By the mid-thirties the stress seems definitely to have shifted from considering film as an organising tool to taking up the aesthetic challenges of quality film production. To some degree groups like the Film and Photo Leagues, Nykino, New Film Alliance and, especially, Frontier Films, may have been the necessary means for sustaining individual, creative talents more than a specific political direction. The individuals who had distinguished themselves by their creative talents gradually coalesced into a contributory current to American film history rather than into pinions of a revolutionary class struggle. Many made industrially or privately sponsored documentaries; others worked under New Deal programmes to produce those two documentaries frequently cited as America's first major contributions to the field in the pre-World War II era – *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937). (Paul Strand, Ralph Steiner, Leo T Hurwitz shared the photography on *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. Steiner subsequently worked on *The City* for the American Institute of Planners on a Carnegie Grant, then drifted to Hollywood to do intermittent work on short subjects. [See Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film*, p 316.]) Still others moved into Hollywood and formed a community of their own, based on common,

* Compiled from Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film* and *New Theater* magazine issues. Also an unpublished paper on Wanzel, University of Iowa, 1970.

114 though somewhat diverse, political interests. Among these men were Jay Leyda, Lewis Jacobs and John Howard Lawson who, together with Edward Dmytryk and Upton Sinclair, taught at the League of American Writers School in Hollywood.²⁴ Some, like Lawson, became part of the ongoing industry and a focus for the red-baiting Hollywood hearings that led to the Hollywood Blacklist, among other things.

As Left filmmakers moved further away from the objectives of the only organisation with a programme at all similar to Newsreel's, The Film and Photo League, their political focus blurred and both tactics and goals became more diffuse. The boundaries between the anti- or non-Hollywood newsreel and documentary and those made by the industry grew less distinct as men and their creative powers moved back and forth across the line with fewer and fewer qualms. Films that bear the names of those active in the early thirties efforts still had indications of a left viewpoint, but so did films made with Federal or private grants by filmmakers solely or primarily concerned with artistry: Joris Ivens' *The Land* (1940) for the US Department of Agriculture, Pare Lorentz's *The Fight for Life* (1940) and Willard Van Dyke's *The Children Must Learn* (1940) both about Southern poverty and its consequences for the Alfred Sloan Foundation. (See Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film*, pp 308-331.) The Film and Photo League's call for films 'reflecting the lives and struggles of the American workers' became a principle, and often a profitable one, that government, private industry, philanthropic trickles of finance capital and the Hollywood system could all support. Even the old dreamland nemesis of the original League, the feature fiction film could concern itself with the working man, even though there were a few distortions. What the Hollywood film could not and did not want to do was to use the film within an organisational context where underlying bourgeois values and assumptions could be criticised. Nor could Hollywood present the working man with a Marxist point of view, at least not without parody. But these flaws became less a focus of outrage when numerous men with strong sympathies for leftist causes worked within the industry and when the strongest leftist organisation, the Communist Party, was kept largely on the defensive. Whether or not even the Film and Photo League had been a bastion of Marxist or revolutionary propaganda of marked impact is open to question (especially considering the criticisms it received from members and allies). And, to add to the general hazing of distinctions, or as might be said today, co-optation, the dominant, 'above ground' figures in documentary filmmaking were also prominent spokesmen for its propagandistic use.

Notes

1. *Experimental Cinema*, I, No 3 (1931), p 37.
2. 'Program of the Cinema Bureau of the International Union of the Revolutionary Theater', *New Theater*, I, No 5 (1934), p 16.

3. *Ibid.*
4. Leo T. Hurwitz, *New Theater*, I, No 7 (1934), p 7.
5. *New Theater*, I, No 10 (1934), p 23.
6. Tom Brandon, 'The Movie Front', *New Theater*, I, No 7 (1934), p 19.
7. Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story* (New York: United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)), (1955), p 253.
8. Ralph Steiner, *Workers' Theater*, August, 1933, cited in California, Legislature, *Fourth Report of the Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California* (1948), p 237.
9. Leo T. Hurwitz, 'Survey of Workers' Films', *New Theater*, I, No 9 (1934), p 22.
10. Sergei Eisenstein, quoted in Leyda, *Kino*, p 220.
11. Sam Brody, 'The Revolutionary Film', *New Theater*, I, No 2 (1934), p 22.
12. Leo T. Hurwitz, 'The Revolutionary Film—Next Step', *New Theater*, I, No 5 (1934), p 15.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ralph Steiner, 'Revolutionary Movie Production', *New Theater*, I, No 8 (1934), p 22.
15. Hurwitz, 'Survey', p 27.
16. *New Theater*, I, No 8 (1934), p 3.
17. Hurwitz, 'Survey', p 28.
18. Hurwitz, 'Revolutionary Film — Next Step', p 15.
19. Ben Belitt, 'The Camera Reconnoiters', *The Nation*, Vol 145, No 21 (1937), p 557.
20. *Ibid*, p 558.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Boyer and Morais, *Labor's Untold Story*, pp 350-365, *passim*.
23. *New Theater*, I, No 1 (1934), p 14.
24. 'Communist Front Organisations', *Fourth Report of the Senate Fact-Finding Committee* (1948), pp 275-76.

Jim Pines

I

During 1969-70 various meeting and conferences were held to discuss the possibility of an alternative film network. Out of these discussions emerged the idea of 'the third circuit', which was in practical terms an alternative *commercial* structure intended to operate in parallel to the major monopolies, ABC and Rank Odeon. The rationale behind the third circuit was geared to the politics of the film industry, it was a direct reaction against the established commercial apparatus, it was essentially pragmatic. There was relatively little interest in the theoretical aspect of alternative cinema: the need to re-examine the nature of film, to re-appropriate the cultural and political function of film, to politicise film aesthetics, were hardly considered. The politics of the third circuit was based on a sort of organisational reformism, one that was lacking a solid ideological perspective.

The idea of the third circuit was represented by the organisation, Parallel Cinema. Parallel Cinema was intended as the 'responsible' production/distribution vehicle for 'the minority film culture', as the apex of a completely independent and self-sustaining structure in which the existing art houses and film societies would be locked into (ie as the exhibition basis). The practical idea was simple: Parallel Cinema would maintain a pool of, say, ten films which it would make available to thirty or forty member film showing groups across the country. As members of the network each group would be obliged to book a minimum of five films per year. Thus the network would be guaranteed at least 150-200 bookings each year - which would cover costs, and hopefully enough for low-budget productions. The idea seemed promising, especially as it involved some of the left-wing cream of British media: eg Joseph Losey, Tony Garnett, Ken Loach, Albert Finney, David Mercer, etc. Although, interestingly enough, this factor was to help provide the death-blow to Parallel Cinema in the end.

There were, however, a number of basic inadequacies inherent in the method used to organise the network which tended to alienate the top-heavy organisation from the 'less influential' participants: on the one side there was a tightly-knit group of politically and morally committed film makers who were dissatisfied with their role in the commercial industry, who saw in Parallel Cinema the economic basis upon which they could produce and exhibit the kinds of films they were not permitted to do consistently in the establishment. In most respects this economic basis for production was the most important thing for these people. The other side of

Parallel Cinema comprised representatives from film societies and clubs, people who were simply interested in getting some movies for their film shows. They were not interested in being just money-makers for film makers in London; nor were they willing to give up the modicum of autonomy they enjoyed and take whatever films the network came up with.

The working party that was set up to formalise the network eventually dispensed with the film society plan and adopted another based on 'community cinema'. This approach would involve hiring cinemas for late night performances, then simply plugging films into them. Research revealed that in fact this approach was impractical, partly because of the expense involved, but mostly because the London-based Parallel Cinema could not ascertain with accuracy the kinds of film any particular neighbourhood would (or would not) patronise.

In other words the people behind Parallel Cinema grossly underestimated the needs peculiar to the provinces; their insistence on control of the network from London for economic reasons alienated film showing groups in the provinces. Parallel Cinema simply wasn't participatory (which most alternatives try to work towards), it was instead more like the Classic cinema circuit, only with a penchant for Rank-like organisation. In the final analysis it was less an expression of a defined film cultural movement, and more a reflection of the levels of disparity and the general lack of urgency that existed within 'the minority film culture' at the time.

II

When the idea of the network failed Parallel Cinema evidently decided to deal with the problem in a more usual manner – ie by getting the films first and taking care of exhibition later. It soon changed its name to what is presently known as the Other Cinema, signed up the established liberal supporters (from its original Parallel Cinema conception) to give the organisation credibility, and started showing movies. This culmination of events occurred in 1970. In the same year Politkino and Liberation Films were established as the second and third distribution/exhibition alternatives. The Other Cinema, Politkino, and Liberation Films are (to varying degrees) the non-establishment distribution/exhibition vehicles for political films in Britain today.

The Other Cinema is a non-profit organisation, a Trust. It is generally committed to promoting the work of independent film makers, although recently it has started to move into a more definite political area (eg Godard and especially Latin American Cinema). Its attitude towards political films can be best described as 'suppliers'; it is not engaged in working on the methods of using film in a militant, agitational, or even educational way:

partly because there are people out there [at the community level] doing it, who know their job. If they want The Hour of the

118 Furnaces, for example, our job is to make it available; we can extend our contribution to that field by making it financially feasible for them to have the film.

The Other Cinema relies on the impetus coming from outside the organisation, from people who are actively using their material: *We'd be stretching ourselves beyond reasonable capacity if we tried to undertake political education work ourselves at the moment, because rightly or wrongly we've decided to set up a distribution administration. One of the problems is that we are still working within several markets in the sense that we have to work in markets because we're trying to do two things: we have got and always have had major financial problems, we've never been stable, and we're moving away from the direction most liberals would patronise. We're becoming less and less involved with film as an art/cultural product, not entirely, but the move is gradually in that direction. On the other hand we're achieving some sort of visible success . . . a reasonably efficient organisation has evolved. . . . But however political we would like to be in our work in the future it has to be underwritten by this financial basis.*

There is a need to radically change the structure of the Other Cinema, and make it less the economic-fixated art/cultural entertainment arm of political cinema it is. One suggestion has been to reorganise its managerial committee (which is presently difficult to define) so as to involve more film makers, exhibitors, writers, workers, etc at an influential level. In other words reappropriate the power without necessarily destroying the organisation's relative stability. Changes like this might indeed alleviate many of the administrative problems the organisation is bogged down with, as well as create some kind of broadly-based politicised organisation. However, changes like these must initiate from within the structure before outside forces can apply effective influence.

III

Politkino shares many of the basic economic problems faced by the Other Cinema, except that it is privately financed and therefore much more precarious. It has been suggested (and is still being suggested) that Politkino and the Other Cinema should combine efforts (as a viable alternative to economic instability), but this doesn't appear feasible at the moment. Two causes can be attributed to this: first, Politkino and the Other Cinema (and to a lesser extent Liberation Films) operate on a semi-competitive basis; and second, each group has a radically different economic structure: as a Trust, for example, the Other Cinemas is less tied to a profit system and more or less assured of the finance needed to cover basic overheads; while Politkino, on the other hand, is struggling to cover overheads alone. The real difference between these organisations is that one (TOC) is just secure enough to attend festivals and negotiate for films, while the other is still dependent on

favours. Certainly most of the films Politkino has were probably paid out of somebody's pocket, which, for the organisation anyway, makes the library all the more important. A merger of Politkino and the Other Cinema would therefore be to the detriment of Politkino, because its work would necessarily be absorbed by the more influential status of the Other Cinema.

In a sense it is uncanny talking about political film groups in this way, because groups and individuals in this area do not share similar (political) interests. But that happens to be one of the unfortunate contradictions within the political film scene at the moment – ie that it comprises disparate groups and individuals whose personal politics work against the politics of the general situation. Social and political disparity within the political film community, however, has not developed into absolute hostility and alienation (certainly nowhere near the level of paranoia exemplified by the *Cine-thique vs Cahiers du Cinéma* debates); there is some flow of co-operation for example, in making facilities and materials available to one another. But this area of co-operation is defined and gets pretty shaky when, for example, three groups decide to handle US Newsreel films in Britain, or when groups compete to corner the Latin American market. There is a distinct air of commercial-style marketeering within the distribution/exhibition area of political films; everybody is conscious of it but nobody seems to have made a definite move towards resolving it.

As the name suggests Politkino (unlike the Other Cinema) deals exclusively in distributing and exhibiting political films. In many respects it is the most consistent and aware of the political film groups under discussion.

It was formed as a reaction against the confusion that permeated the alternative film scene during Parallel Cinema's abortive efforts in 1970. Politkino's initial policy took roughly the following shape:

1. It was interested in films which would not otherwise get into Britain; this criterion was seen as being somewhat impractical in the long run, because it tended to breed a form of competitiveness.
2. It tried to concentrate on films from the Third World.
3. It was interested in anything that could be described as left-wing films, admittedly a nebulous criterion:

I think political film as a classification is a misnomer, however. But to describe them for want of a better word let's call them political films. I think that what we do other people would probably call political films. I don't quite see it that way. Obviously I would not show right-wing films . . . and I would make some further distinctions: for example, maybe show a liberal film from the Third World but not one from England'.

4. Politkino was also interested in films that were important as movies, important in the development of film form.

In the beginning Politkino's selection potential was restricted,

120 inasmuch as it relied heavily on film makers offering their films (which Politkino gladly accepted provided the film(s) met their criteria). It was only after achieving a degree of confidence and recognition that it was able to take the initiative with consistency.

But whether the industry exists or not doesn't injure us at all. We are completely independent. We are not, however, completely independent of the general affluence of western society. All organisations like ours that have a half-capitalist and half-socialist approach can only exist because there's quite a lot of money around, because universities are able to pay fifteen, twenty-five pounds for a screening; it just comes out of the students' union. If this were a very poor country our sort of operation would stop immediately; it would have to be something different: Let's say like in South America where any groups that want to see political films don't have twenty or fifty to choose from. There's maybe one film which they have to work with for maybe five years. But that wouldn't happen here because we have at the same time a highly developed subversive television (by subversive, I mean it is the establishment which gives the impression of being fairly left-wing by letting the Trotskyites, for example, say something). But what's possible in Bolivia with the Indians is not possible with the workers in East London. It's naive to think we can do it the same way. So if we lose the rich society as we have it now all these alternative newspapers, alternative distributors, etc., will disappear. Simply because the carpet underneath our feet will be pulled away. There is still quite a lot of money involved.

There now comes the difference between us and the Co-operatives: the Co-op gets all their films free from people who manage to make the film and make five or six prints, which they send to whatever Co-op they choose. In other words, distribution comes into the budget of film making, it's more or less the same process. Whereas we operate, though with a different product, nearly, or at least half-and-half in the capitalist film producers area: where people say 'well the film costs £10,000, you must at least pay for the prints, etc, etc'. So the economics do come into it rather strongly, and it means that when people come to us and say 'well you have the right sort of films but now you have to give them to the right sort of people', and the right sort of people don't have any money – then the whole wagon gets unhitched, the whole thing breaks down, there is no margin you can work on.

Because it was committed to spending time and energy contending with practical problems like administration, getting films, and maintaining the library, Politkino has not been able to experiment with the practicalities of film. Like the Other Cinema they rely on the political intent of the people booking the material

(without stipulating that the films should be used in a particular way). 121

Is there any way in which film criticism and film theory can fill this gap?

One has to differentiate from what the critic can do and what he can't do. He cannot educate film makers. The film maker must educate himself, ideally with the help of the audience (eg having discussions with film shows). . . . But in most cases, not always, I would prefer the critics to present us with information rather than with actual criticism. But the choice between information and theory depends very much where you are. In England, Screen seems to go the way of theory, they're not so much interested in information, they want theory. In France nearly all the film magazines go in for theory – just because for years and years they had supplied the information. Furthermore they don't have to supply that much information because people there actually go and look at films. Obviously you don't have to tell people about John Ford if they go and look at John Ford. I think in England we are rather low on the steps. . . . Obviously there has to be a theory but I doubt very much whether it's very sensible to have the theory before you have the film-making. In England you have no political film-making, so there is no need for political film theory. You can talk about South America, but nobody is writing about South America: where are the articles? Where are the other writers? They are not there simply because the information doesn't exist – which proves my point, without information you cannot do the theory.

Doesn't this suggest that one should be part of a political body?

I see the necessity to work with a political group if you get more into films made in England, if you get films that are made in the community and completely relevant to the community. To reach what is euphemistically called the grassroots you would need a political organisation, because cinemas and film societies don't work anymore. At the moment I don't think we are really strong enough [to cope with this responsibility] because ideally we should reach a point with the distribution where it is strong enough to pay for productions, where we came to it at the beginning when Losey et al talked about it. Of course they were talking about a different thing. I'm talking about the amount of £3,000 to £4,000 per film, or even less if the equipment is there, and doing something like a monthly newsreel. But to do that means that everybody has to be not only ideologically safe, but also economically. So let's get these very boring and basic things done; then we will have set ourselves up. And if we're still the same people and haven't turned into greedy I don't know what, then we will be able to do the newsreel thing, or any sort of work.

Liberation Films evolved out of a national conference involving the Other Cinema, Politkino, Cinema Action, and various film showing groups, gathered to discuss (again) the alternative network; although in actual fact Liberation Films was formed as the distribution apparatus for US Newsreel films in Britain. During this time Newsreels were being smuggled into Britain by Angry Arts, a film showing group of expatriate Americans involved in anti-Vietnam war activities, and used for agitational-propaganda programmes. The money Angry Arts made from film shows and bookings was generally sent to Newsreel groups in America. That was one contradiction; another contradiction concerned the validity of Newsreels outside the context of an American audience and situation. Britain's complicity in the Vietnam war was too vague a notion to render the fundamentally American films valid, certainly not in any active political sense. Evidently the majority of people who attended Angry Arts' programmes were in any case American, which made the situation all the more ludicrous. When the Angry Arts group dissipated, the Newsreel films were left in the hands of British groups which more or less had complete freedom to exploit the films as they saw fit. Liberation Films secured the use of Newsreels with a policy to extend their function; at the same time they established themselves as an independent film group.

Liberation Films functions as a production/distribution/exhibition/advice service:

For developing the use and comprehension of film, and its extensions into educational and social fields.

At the moment we're scientists, we're carrying out experiments, we're finding out whether you can use film to break down barriers that exist between people in such a way as it's going to help them to be able to talk about something which is important to them in their lives.

Talk about what?

The best thing people can do is talk about themselves and say 'I', and not make objective statements. This is what we like to get going in a film showing situation.

But how does that relate to political films?

. . . I'm seeking a new film aesthetic, it excites me more than any other aspect of what I'm doing. But I know it's something I can't deal with at this stage . . . only in a tiny way . . . we can have mild experiments that interest me. But not at the level like Screen. Certainly the big confusion around something like Screen is the film as such, as an aesthetic form, as an art form. They are trying to promote this all the time; their overriding interest is to arouse aesthetic interest in the art of film. That's good, that's

OK. But we're trying to do something else: we're trying to use film as a tool, as a device. We're trying to alert people, and turn them on to the potential of using film as a tool. There's this big distraction all the time about the aesthetics of cinema; it's obviously important, but not in the way Screen is dealing with it.

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But surely they fill a gap in presenting film theory.

It might seem useful in the end . . . but who reads it, who sees the films, and what happens. It kind of all goes on, seemingly it's one more theory next year, the next issue has another theory put forward. Life goes on exactly the same, with all these people participating in discussions – and they read the books and see the films – and nothing changes. It's just boring. I wonder how people can sustain it, I believe they don't. I believe they can do it for three or four years, it's mental gymnastics and they play it – and they just drop out of it and pick up their original position in society, because they get their minds smashed by it.

Liberation Films aesthetics is the aesthetics of pragmatism; they are particularly concerned with the physical and social use of film. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to assert that they are more social than political, and that their social critique is fundamentally humanist. But because they have locked themselves in a definite education-media role, their suspicion of theory, their vigorous anti-intellectualism, is frankly disturbing. But at the same time their practical work remains the best example of education-propaganda at community level. What they are especially concerned with is techniques in presentation, ie with not using film as a substitute for teacher/presenter, but rather as a catalyst. For them the function of film is:

to inform, to provoke discussion and action, and to break down the unnatural barriers that exist between people who want to participate in the affairs of their community and society.

V

Underlying every alternative structure there is a desire to eventually carry on production work: the distribution/exhibition groups have worked towards setting up outlets first, making the outlets commercially viable, before actually dealing with the problems of political film making. With the exception of Liberation Films, whose production/distribution/exhibition concerns are interlocked (although they rely on Council Grants and Trusts to subsidise film projects) none of the other groups have really solved the triad problem. What has happened is that groups primarily concerned with film making have had to subsidise their political work with capital made from commercial work; their outlets are defined by the nature of their agit prop activities. Of course the very idea of political film making in Britain (ie outside the leftist commercial

124 structure) is fraught with enormous problems.

In 1968 The Berwick Street Collective was formed; it was started by a group of film makers who had left the agit prop group Cinema Action, and who were particularly interested in developing the practice and theory of making political films. They had previously been involved with campaign film making, reactive film making, which basically involved recording every strike and demonstration as if these were part of the impending revolution.

We found that we couldn't progress as serious political film makers in that sort of situation. So it was that more and more we came together because we wanted to try and create the time and the space to do things at our own speed, and have the possibility of working out during the process of filming and editing the problems that arose – ie everything that has to do with the relationship of the political film maker to the material and to the subject.

You could say that one of the most important aspects was in fact establishing a working group that worked not simply on particular film projects, but could also create something like these cutting rooms [which the Collective makes available to various political and film making groups] and maintaining them. Another thing we have done is to try and support ourselves financially – which has meant working commercially in advertising. This is how we see the best method at the moment, one of the only means of getting the resources which can maintain this cutting room which can go some of the way to paying the essential costs on a film. Perhaps one of the most important ways in which we are a collective is that we are working collectively to get money.

What are some of the problems experienced in political film making?

... there is one type of political film making where you are almost inevitably, due to the way that you're involved in events, reacting to situations the whole time. In that way you're treating both film and yourself, and to a large extent your relationships with other people around you, as though you were a newsman, dashing off in all sorts of different directions. There's an enormous danger in that, particularly if you're very politically aware, because you are living within the contradictions of the present to such a degree that all the time you see something which is carrying the struggle further forward, and therefore you try and make a film about it and it becomes extremely important. Your belief in that action that may be happening forty miles away is so intense that you must in fact mirror it and build it into something that is forcing the situation further on. We were very much trapped inside this for a long time, in reacting to events. Film is something where there's the danger of this happening. As far as lessons we have learned that's probably the most important.

The comfort with which film was received. If you went to Liverpool or to Vauxhall car works, and you made a cinetrack about that, a kind of agit prop film making, everything was clear: you'd show the film and everybody liked it. The film maker didn't have the time to deal with crucial situations; the film maker is reduced continuously to this agit prop film making. But films are more complex than just going around making visual aids to the revolution. When we started showing films in a particular factory in Liverpool it was for Communist shop stewards; we thought that was fantastic, but they never let us out of their sight.

Why?

There are so many levels that come into this. For a start the idea of equipment in conjunction with filming the working class struggle – eg who we are, where we come from, what our history is; the idea of film that is not television but actually political and for the working class; and the kind of safe areas in which you can work. There is a kind of conspiracy if you like between you and the person you're making the film with in a working class struggle . . . that you are with your camera protecting yourself in one sense, and they in their terms are protecting themselves from you being represented as a camera.

If this isn't a practical problem peculiar to Britain, how then do you see it (generally speaking) in the context of British cinema?

We have had such a lazy cinema here. There have been various re-births of cinema in other countries such as Italy and France, which had happened as results of events: films were an expression of, a reflection of, events that were happening. In this country the economic argument is used on the one hand as a defence, and there's a sort of prejudiced elitist argument on the other, which prevents people from breaking out of this bracket of laziness . . . in a sense the result of this is the distance between some sort of possibly radical theory and action, where the intentions or the desire to do something just isn't materialising. . . . Television over the last thirty years has had so much its own way, has so much constructed a language of its own, has to an incredible degree managed the visual side of our lives with absolutely no obstruction, or no alternative at all. At least nobody is being clear as to what the alternatives are, even in the underground subculture very little is being done. And so TV has maintained this control and at the same time people's perception of alternative possibilities. [You notice this when you take political films outside of London.]

How does the political film maker deal with this?

126 *The film maker cannot and does not and should not exist in the cutting room. The only way to grapple with these problems is by making films and taking them around. The film maker has to live outside the cutting room experience; he has to live in both where his material originates from and then when the film is going around, and deal with how the film is being used. [For example] one's relationship to the working class is not the same as the relationship to the problems encountered with the cinema or film makers or critics . . . but the pressures are equally intense on both sides as to whether you're talking in terms of film criticism and theory, or whether you're talking about what is expressed in much of the directly day to day political terms (ie during your working process). One has to be challenged, and you just have to go out and meet it and work it through. That we do by not only making a political film, but also by living, filmwise, outside the cutting room. There are various battlegrounds a film may encounter: one is at the critical/theoretical level, the other is the relationship of film makers like ourselves to the working class movement and to the socialist movement in general.*

The areas I've covered here by no means represent a complete picture of the political film milieu in Britain (or, more accurately, London); what I've tried to do is locate some of the areas of disparity existing within the political film structure without wanting to alienate the various groups and persuasions involved. It is obvious in any case that there is a need to iron out the contradictions – through discussions, seminars, film shows – and to begin to define not some mythical circuit but the existing (and developing) situation we work in.

N.B. – I have excluded the important agit prop group Cinema Action because of their reluctance to discuss their work outside the area of their activities.

Interviews were with:

Nick Hart-Williams (the Other Cinema)

Andi Engels (Politkino)

Tony Wickert (Liberation Films)

Hugh Trevelyan, Mark Karlin, Richard Mordaunt (Berwick Street Collective)

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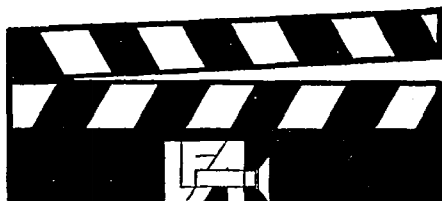
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Paul Willemen*

Since the *Screen* issue of Summer 1971, a great deal has been written on Sirk's work; the interview book, *Sirk on Sirk*¹ by Jon Halliday was published and a book of essays compiled by the Edinburgh Film Festival and edited by Jon Halliday and Laura Mulvey, *Douglas Sirk*² was published recently. In addition, the magazine *Monogram* devoted a special issue to the melodrama with special emphasis on Sirk's work and *Positif* reviewed the *Screen* issue, adding new material, some of which was translated into English and included in the Edinburgh book. In conjunction with the book, the Edinburgh Film Festival mounted an extensive retrospective of Sirk's work which was subsequently taken over en-bloc by the National Film Theatre. Douglas Sirk himself spent a great deal of time and energy answering questions and helping critics and students in the arduous but rewarding task they had set themselves: to try and understand how a Sirk film works.

As Jon Halliday points out in *Douglas Sirk* (p60), Sirk has been praised either for his stylistic qualities or else for being a master of the weepie. With the exception of the two articles by Halliday and J-L Bourget, the essays in *Douglas Sirk* reflect these two apparently irreconcilable approaches. Sirk is either praised for making extraordinary films in spite of the exigencies of the weepie as a genre, or else it is the weepie-genre itself which is validated, and Sirk is brought forward as its most accomplished practitioner. Indeed it is these genuine contradictions within the work of Douglas Sirk which to some extent invite both approaches.

In order to understand this contradiction and to assess the function of such contradictions in the Sirkian system, one must again turn to Sirk's theatrical experience in Germany in the twenties. In 1929 Sirk staged Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* with immense success. As left-wing intellectuals in the German theatrical world, both artists reacted against expressionism, although it is quite clear that both were equally influenced by the movement. Brecht's early plays bear witness to this, as do some of Sirk's Hollywood films; *The Tarnished Angels* in particular. In fact, Sirk makes a direct allusion to expressionist ideas in the phantasmagoria speech in *Captain Lightfoot*. Although it is not clear whether Brecht approved of Sirk's production of the *Threepenny Opera* (*Sirk on Sirk*, p23), during his career in Hollywood Sirk made frequent use of techniques Brecht had pioneered in the play and achieved very similar results. In his study *Lecture De Brecht*³

* Copyright Paul Willemen 1972.

Bernard Dort describes Brecht's pre-epic technique as that of the 'boomerang image'. Brecht presented the theatre public with the image of life that it wanted to see on the stage, but in order to denounce the unreality of such an image, to denounce its ideological character (p189) Brecht himself explained that the *Threepenny Opera* attacks bourgeois conceptions not only by choosing them as a content, by the mere fact of presenting them on the stage, but also by the manner of presentation itself. The play shows a way of life which the spectator wishes to see portrayed in the theatre. At the same time, however, he is forced to confront aspects of this life with which he would rather not be confronted: he not only sees his wishes fulfilled, but he sees them criticised and is thus forced to perceive himself as object, rather than subject. Bernard Dort continues:

'The picturesque robbers of the *Threepenny Opera* are not bandits: they are robbers only as the bourgeoisie dreams them. In the final analysis we realise that they are in fact members of the bourgeoisie. Or, more precisely, it is through the disguise of the robbers that the spectators will come to recognise themselves as being bourgeois. A subtly engineered set of displacements and discontinuities facilitates such a self-recognition. In this way Brecht has attempted to sabotage the notion of the theatre as a mirror (for our fantasies). . . . Brecht puts on the stage what seems to be the image of the kind of exotic society that the spectator wants to see. In fact what the spectator discovers in the very unreality of such an image, is himself. The mirror of the stage does not reflect the world of the audience any more, but the ideological disguises of the audience itself. Suddenly, at that point, the mirror refers us back to our own reality. It bounces the images of the spectacle back to us – like a boomerang' (pp190-191).

Sirk's films operate in a similar way. It has been shown how Sirk takes distance from the spectacle he presents, but that there is no distance between the audience and the film (*Douglas Sirk*, p23). In fact, Sirk mercilessly implicates the audience by the use of techniques deliberately designed to involve the spectator emotionally (*Sirk on Sirk*, p70). In contradistinction to social-comment-melodramas such as *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, *Gentleman's Agreement* (both by Elia Kazan), *Peyton Place* (by Mark Robson), *No Down Payment* (by Martin Ritt) etc, Sirk's films short circuit the so-called channel of communication between director and audience. Instead of inscribing the director's personal view or message into the film and thus by extension denying that any 'personal' statement must to a very large extent be dictated by both the society and the industry within which the director works, Sirk inscribes his distance from the spectacle into the film. In this way, the diegesis ceases to

130 appear transparent: it becomes the point beyond which the spectator cannot go. It is this sense of an absence behind the diegesis, so to speak, which Fred Camper (*Douglas Sirk*, p79 ff) quite mistakenly describes as a two-dimensionality within Sirk's films.

Sirk's films could be described as the opposite of a distorting mirror: the world the audience wants to see (an exotic world of crime, wealth, corruption, passion, etc) is a distorted projection of the audience's own fantasies to which Sirk applies a correcting device, mirroring these very distortions. This conjunction of, or rather contradiction between distantiation and implication, between fascination and its critique, allows Sirk to thematise⁴ a great many contradictions inherent in the society in which he worked and the world he depicted. It equally gives us the means to read Sirk's own contradictory position within that society and vis-a-vis that world.

Jon Halliday has indicated (*Douglas Sirk*, p59 ff) and has been supported on this point by Sirk himself (*Sirk on Sirk*, p89) that the society depicted in most of the films is characterised by a smugness and complacency masking decay and disintegration from within, just beneath the surface. Sirk also indicates his own contradictory position within the society in which he found himself (*Sirk on Sirk*, p86). He was attempting to make a critique of a society which: (a) provided him with the money and the tools to make his films, but (b) would not be offended to the extent that it would withdraw its support in the form of box-office receipts. These primary contradictions generated further, secondary contradictions in Sirk's work:

1. Although the films were products of, for and about Eisenhower-America, they were misunderstood at that time. Sirk explained this in terms of the American audience's failure to recognise irony (*Sirk on Sirk*, p73) and the lack of a genuine film culture based on a theory of aesthetics (*Sirk on Sirk*, p72).
2. Now that these films are beginning to be understood, even in English-speaking countries, American society has undergone a process of social change and now produces quite different films. This change contributes to some extent to the contemporary critic's tendency to misread Sirk's films: critics tend to judge Sirk's presentation of Eisenhower-America by the standards of contemporary critiques of ideology, thus committing the mistake of neglecting the true relevance and meaning of the films at the time they were produced. One of the major contributions of Jon Halliday's writing on Sirk is precisely that he situates Sirk's films in their own historical context, a fact the critic has to grasp before he can comment on the relevance of Sirk's films in our own historical context. Within the films themselves, these externally determined contradictions are mirrored in a wide variety of ways, often differing from film to film:

1. Displacements and discontinuities in plot construction: 'The supporting part in the picture is your hidden leading man' (Sirk on Sirk, p98). Examples of this can be found in *Sign of the Pagan*, *Written on the Wind*, *Thunder on the Hill*, etc. A creative use of discontinuity can be seen in Sirk's comments on his happy-endings: 'It makes the crowd happy. To the few it makes the aporia more transparent'. (Sirk on Sirk, p132).

2. Contradictions in characterisation: '(Taza is) a symbolic in-between man: he is an Indian, but there has seeped into the character this element of civilisation'. (Sirk on Sirk, p82). Also Kyle Hadley's invitation to Lucy (in *Written on the Wind*) to come and 'meet an entirely different character' which manifests itself only when he's 'up in the blue' but is present in the background throughout the film. In fact, all Sirk's best films contain such split-characters.

3. Ironic use of camera-positioning and framing: in *The Tarnished Angels*, the identification with the solid character, Burke Devlin, is undermined by the camera which shoots him in low angles, so that he appears to hover over the Shumanns as a bird of prey. As we 'see' through Devlin's eyes, this is a classic example of the camera-style achieving a boomerang-image. In *All that Heaven Allows*, such irony is achieved in the first scenes within the close-knit Scott family by framing Cary Scott in such a way that she always remains separated from her two children. In this context, Tim Hunter's comments on *Summer Storm* (Douglas Sirk, p31 sq) and Mike Prokosh's essay on *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, p89 sq) abound with examples of such inner contradictions.

4. Formal negations of ideological notions inherent in the script: *Magnificent Obsession* contains many such elements of parody: the 'true source of spiritual life' is compared to electricity supplying the current for a non-descript sort of table-lamp; the camera movement revealing the god-like purveyor of worldly wisdom benignly nodding to Bob Merrick when the latter is about to perform a tricky operation. Other examples of such elements of parody and of the ironic use of cliché are given in the essay *Distantiation and Douglas Sirk* (Douglas Sirk, p23 ff).

5. Irony in the function of camera-movement: Sirk's camera, as a rule, remains at some distance from the actors. The space in the diegesis, although rigorously circumscribed, is vast and solidly established. Long-shots and mid-shots predominate. The camera, however, is almost continuously in motion. This mobility of the camera is designed to implicate the viewer on an emotional level (Sirk on Sirk, p43), while the distance from the characters suggests detachment.

132 This last type of contradiction, that between mobility (ie insecurity, emotional involvement) and distance (ie detachment, solidly establishing a locus for the diegesis) refers to a dialectic which is perhaps the most dynamic aspect of the Sirkian system, because it underpins the very notion of the Sirkian spectacle: people put themselves on show in order to protect themselves. Mirrors are nearly always there, in the background, to remind them of the fact that they live in a world where privacy is virtually non-existent. The characters are aware of being under scrutiny, so their best protection is to try and take command of the situation by determining their own appearance, if necessary even by deliberately putting on an act. However, the persona developed in this way functions as a trap: it is the persona, the pretence which comes to dominate, causing conflicts against which there is no further defence. Thus the persona in fact is shown to reveal them in a far more naked and vulnerable way. At the same time, the audience is presented with what it would like to see – such as people suffering the extremes of anxiety, titilating sexual images – while the criticism of such voyeurism is inscribed in the film itself. We are not just looking into a world which is unaware of our watchful presence (the mirrors amongst other things convey this lack of privacy within the film), nor are the characters in the diegesis mere puppets in the hands of the Great-Manipulator-Behind-The-Scenes. We watch them, they are aware of being watched and perform accordingly, attempting to protect themselves by controlling what they allow us – and their fellow characters – to see. The effect is that the audience sees nothing more than the distortions and constraints which it forced upon the spectacle in the first place. In other words, the audience's ideology is unmasked and is made to rebound back upon itself. Awareness of its own reality is forced upon it, against its wishes. This dialectic also finds its representation within the film: although the characters are aware of being under scrutiny (a form of surveillance manifested as pressures to conform to standards of behaviour imposed on them by their environment), they refuse to recognise the mirror-image of themselves, or better still, they refuse to look into the mirror. This is amply illustrated by Cary Scott's fear of the TV-set in *All that Heaven Allows*. Blindness can be another such refusal to see, as in *Magnificent Obsession*. Helen Phillips has lost her sense of security (security being a husband whose life depended on the immediate availability of a resuscitator!) and refuses to see the man who wants to restore that security. A Sirk film sets out to do for the audience what the TV-set does for Cary Scott or surgery for Helen Phillips. This dialectic between self-protection and exhibitionism, sensationalism and puritanism is particularly relevant for the whole of the Hollywood cinema, even today (see Charles Barr's analysis of Sam Peckinpah's rape-scene in *Straw Dogs*, in *Screen*, Vol 13 n 2, 1972).

Only now, after Jon Halliday's interview book and the prelimi-

nary explorations published in the Edinburgh Film Festival's book of essays, has the ground been cleared for a more accurate and comprehensive study of the work of Douglas Sirk. Such a study would have to examine in some detail this extremely complex web of contradictions, the interaction of which forms the Sirkian system.

Both the views of Sirk as a Marxist critic of Eisenhower-America or of Sirk as the greatest exponent of the bourgeois weepie are equally misguided. In fact, Sirk's position in the history of the American cinema closely parallels Tolstoy's position in the history of Soviet literature. Lenin considered Tolstoy to be a unique and extremely valuable artist because he dramatised and presented, the contradictions within Russian society at the turn of the century, a time when Tsarism wasn't strong enough to prevent a revolution while the revolution did not yet have enough strength to defeat Tsarism. Sirk performed a similar function in the American cinema in the fifties: he depicted a society which appeared to be strong and healthy, but which in fact was exhausted and torn apart by collective neuroses.

In this context, it becomes possible to understand and explain the enormous success of many of Sirk's best films at the time of their release, and the subsequent neglect and/or rejection of his work by the 'intelligentsia' for many years. The reason for this is analogous to the reason why Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* was, and still is, such a huge public success. As Bernard Dort points out, the technique of the boomerang-image carries with it some ominous pitfalls. Either the sophistication of the process is ignored, thus allowing the bourgeois audience to operate a recovery-maneuvre: the audience indeed recognises its own image as bourgeois, but enhanced with the exotic prestige of robbers (or corrupt millionaires, actresses or stunt fliers). Or alternatively, if the audience is more knowledgeable about aesthetic processes, they have to reject such a representation, as their ideology does not allow them to recognise themselves in that mirror-image. Hence the rejection or willful misreading (by turning it into camp) of Sirk's films by the reviewers and nostalgia-freaks.

In spite of these pitfalls, the fact remains that, taking into account the historical and economic context within which he worked, Sirk developed the most refined and complex possible system to convey his critique under the circumstances. Even if they did not allow him to make this critique as explicit as he might have wanted to (except perhaps in films such as *Written on the Wind* and *The Tarnished Angels*), the Sirkian system at least manifested and thematised the contradictions within that society in a way which, throughout American film history, has perhaps only been equalled by Ernst Lubitsch.

1. Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk*, Cinema One Series. Secker & Warburg, London 1971.
2. Jon Halliday and Laura Mulvey (Eds), *Douglas Sirk*. Edinburgh Film Festival, Edinburgh 1972.
3. Bernard Dort, *Lecture De Brecht*, Eds du Seuil, Paris, 1960.
4. This term is used in the sense of transforming the conditions of production into a theme through a process of internalisation. American capitalism can be internalised into a theme by a systematic refusal to use, or alternatively by a systematic use of extremely expensive camera movements, such as crane-shots or tracking-shots.

Sam Rohdie

The dominant aesthetic of British art, at least since the 1930's, has been realism.¹ That realism conceived the artistic text primarily as a *means* to convey a certain social, ethical or philosophic content. Attention to the art object was sacrificed for a concern with the significance of the world created by the art work and the meaning and relevance that world had to the external world.

British practice contrasted with the work of the European *avant-garde* and with modernist concerns generally – the art object as the prime material reality, a concentration on the 'text' as a construct of signs and as the locus of any problem about art and aesthetics, the disjuncture between signs and meaning. There was and remains a kind of puritanism in British art, an ambiguity about artistic work itself, a belief that art requires another, a 'higher' justification, some moral claim and that its prime task is not to reflect about art, but about the world, life.

In criticism works were 'read' from a position similar to that which informed the making of art. F. R. Leavis in praise of Jane Austen . . .

As a matter of fact, when we examine the formal perfection of *Emma*, we find that it can be appreciated only in terms of the moral preoccupations that characterise the novelist's peculiar interest in life.²

What was 'good' in *Emma* and Austen was 'bad' in *Madame Bovary* and Flaubert.

. . . the weakness in *Madame Bovary*: the discrepancy between the technical (aesthetic) intensity, with the implied attribution of interest to the subject, and the actual moral and human paucity of this subject on any mature valuation.³

The disjuncture Leavis notices between the ethical-human and technique (aesthetic) constituted a damaging criticism of Flaubert. The aesthetic without the moral becomes somehow immoral, *mere* technique. The demand by Leavis is both for coherence (form and content matched) and for a sort of philosophic humanism. Peter Wollen's comment on this humanist assumption whose aesthetic base is realism is essentially correct.

The world itself is an untidy place, full of loose ends, but the artefact can tie all these loose ends together and thus convey to us a meaningful truth, an insight, which enables us to go back to the real world with a re-ordered and re-cycled experience which will enable us to cope better, live more fully and so on.

Leavis on Flaubert is neatly compared to John Grierson or Lindsay Anderson on Hitchcock. Hitchcock was praised for technical virtuosity, aesthetic skill, inventiveness, imaginative devices, but ultimately criticised, even condemned for these qualities, applied as they were to trivial themes, empty characters, a fundamental unseriousness.⁵ Hitchcock's means of artistic construction became his prime deficiencies. What was such formal inventiveness in aid of? What did it tell us about the world? How did the text function as a *means* of communication?

The worst consequence of this moral social humanism in criticism was the capture of aesthetics by ethics and social philosophy and, in most cases (Leavis apart), a devaluation of formal elements (as such), an inattentiveness to the text, the signs by which the art object was composed.⁶

The British documentary films of the 1930s, the paintings of the 1940s, and the socially-committed theatre, painting and film of the post-War British New Wave functioned either as illustrations of a social reality or of some ethical personal vision. Much of the work was unashamed direct social propaganda, the communication of a 'message', the education of the citizen.⁷ The British *avant-garde* was a rearguard, marching backwards towards the romanticism and realism of the past century.

Critical assumptions about literature and painting prevailed in the area of film criticism. But there, these assumptions were more transparent and blatantly expressed. To the devaluation of mere technique were added associations of commerce and entertainment, purveyed to the vulgar rabble.⁸ Hollywood became the paradigm for 'all that is worst' — 'size for its own sake . . . the star system for its own sake . . . glossy photography, high-toned settings, lushly hypnotic scores'.⁹ Opposed to Hollywood, and, valued by these critics, was a personal cinema of integrity, poetry, individual vision, or, the 'art' cinema where meaning was announced with weighty symbols, which had significance and social relevance. Hollywood was industry, commercial product, impersonal, trivialising and trivial despite its technical expertise and craftsmanship.

Into this depressing context *Movie* appeared in 1962 asking 'for a cinema which has style, imagination, personality and, because of these meaning'.¹⁰

Movie seemed to overthrow the entire hierarchy of critical assumptions, and the films and taste based on these, which had informed British film culture. *Movie* writers resurrected the film text, placed its formal and stylistic organisation, its devices, at the centre of critical discourse about cinema: ' . . . until it is accepted that style is worthy of passionate feeling and detailed analysis there will be no change'.¹¹

Movie fellow-feeling was with *Cahiers du Cinema*, with the revaluation of the American movie, the notion of *mise-en-scène* as crucial analytically. 137

... French criticism concentrates on *how* a film should be made, rather than on *why*.

To us this seems an eminently sane way of proceeding. In this sense, *why* he makes a film is a question for a director to ask himself in the light of his experience, his self-knowledge and his moral convictions. *How* he expresses his personal vision, assuming that he has one, is much more a matter between the film-maker and his audience. If thought and feeling are not to be devoted to style than we are indefinitely committed to ambitious nonsenses like *The Entertainer* and *Flame in the Streets*.¹²

The idea of *mise-en-scène* was closely connected to *Movie*'s interest in the commercial Hollywood popular movie and in directors like Nicholas Ray, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Otto Preminger, Joseph Losey. *Movie* critics, like those of the *Cahiers*, because they concentrated on the 'how', the manner of saying, on style, pre-disposed them to the elegance, lucidity, technical brilliance and unpretentiousness of the American cinema.

Movie critics found their 'meaning' in narrative forms, dramatic organisation, stylistic patterning. Meaning *was* style, style, meaning, not something to be imposed externally on the text, or taken out, extracted, from it. Those directors who most realised the synthesis which *Movie* writers valued were most lauded. Preminger's objectivity, liberalism, democracy, intelligence was his *mise-en-scène*.

His aim is to present characters, actions, and issues clearly and without prejudice. He is concerned to show events, not to demonstrate his feelings about them. This objectivity is a mark of his respect for his characters and, particularly, for his audience...

Preminger rejects every stylistic, emotional or narrative distortion. ... We can only grasp the realities behind surface appearance by looking clearly and intelligently at the appearance itself, by appreciating that the appearance is a reality.¹³

And this, on Hawks, by the *Movie* critic Robin Wood:

If in *Rio Bravo* the traditional Western theme of the defence of civilised values is reduced to little more than a pretext, where, then, does Hawks put the emphasis? On values below the social level, but on which social values, if valid, must necessarily be built: man's innate need for self-respect or self-definition. As a motif, it will be easily seen that this pervades the film, as a

138 unifying principle of composition. It is stated through virtually every character . . . like the subject of a fugue, and developed throughout contrapuntally with fugal rigour.¹⁴

If *Movie* inscribed the Hollywood film into discourse about cinema in Britain and if, in doing so, it called attention to the structure of the text, *Movie* nevertheless carried out that inscription within, rather than opposed to, a critical tradition already familiar and easily relatable to the work of F. R. Leavis.

Movie critics wrote of technical devices, aesthetic forms – narrative, dramatic action, character, editing, motifs, camera, themes – but valued these only if linked into structured *wholes*, patterned *coherences*, only if *synthesised* in a manner to convey ‘meaning’. The mark of a ‘good’ film was rich meanings and complexity of style, both indissolubly wedded, each detail of the film containing, contributing to and revealing the essential whole.

This view of the art work as an ‘organic’ whole, expressing important ‘truths’, the essence of which the critic is positioned to grasp and, thereby, to correctly position the spectator, connects back to Romantic aesthetics and to its heir, Realist aesthetics. The art work in *Movie* was a kind of decal, a transparency, with an ideal or original ‘content’ which the critic could decode, clarify, and, to an extent, restore.¹⁵

The ‘organic’ work, in *Movie*, took precedence over any generality about artistic forms and techniques. It was always the forms and techniques within this or that given film text that *Movie* writers regarded as primary. All hope of a theoretical, scientific view of the cinema, abstract and specifying was ruled out by this sort of approach.¹⁶

Movie, at its best (V. F. Perkins), did explicate formal arrangements and stylistic devices, but this exercise could, and often did, lapse into an extreme of moralism, anti-intellectuality and a kind of validation, not so much of taste, but of intuition (Robin Wood).

. . . the beauty of the scene, a very touching one, arises not from any content that can be intellectualised and removed from the images, but from the very precise timing of the acting and the editing, from gesture, expression, intonation, exchanged glance. This is why (the reader had best be warned now) *Hawks* is ultimately unanalysable. When I am asked by sceptics why I like a film like *Red Line 7000* I can work out a detailed intellectual explanation . . . but it doesn’t really satisfy me. What I really like about *Red Line 7000* is the vital tension that is expressed throughout in the great complex of action, gesture, expression, speech, camera movement, camera placing, and editing, that is cinema: the sense of the film’s being the work of a whole man, intuitively and spontaneously, as well as intellectually, alive.¹⁷

The importance of the decorative aspect of the film should be clear. . . . They are the continual manifestation of the same generosity that determined the film's ending – the expression of a nature that, fully aware of the possibilities of human misery and spiritual imprisonment, remains itself happy and free. Like all other great directors, Demy is 'first and foremost' a moralist: an artist intelligently concerned with the quality of human lives. The 'decoration' is but an aspect of the morality.¹⁸

Movie certainly expanded the range of cinema criticism by its bringing to attention the Hollywood movie, but this *politique*, based as it was on a narrow, and ultimately backward-looking aesthetic, cut *Movie* off from films whose artistic construction did not conform to their critical assumptions. The debate on Antonioni and Godard amongst the *Movie* critics is instructive. V. F. Perkins . . .

As a piece of narrative *The Eclipse* is just inept. In almost every other way it's a ridiculous film. It's extremely ugly in its style; the shots are up to the usual decorative standards *but they just don't fit with one another*.¹⁹ (My italics).

As a critic I look for a harmony between action and presentation . . . I don't think *Vivre sa Vie* gives you a correspondence between the shape of the film, in particular the shot-to-shot layout of its individual sequences, and what happens in them.²⁰

What Perkins dismisses, Paul Mayersberg defends – there is a harmony, there is a correspondence, form and content *do* cohere. The common assumption is that film is a communication, differences hinge on whether the communication is well or badly done. But the Godard movie, in particular, questions the entire notion of communication as such, both between the characters in the film and that represented by the film.²¹ *Movie* attitudes – 'I enjoy the film for its devices, but I'm pre-occupied with the devices at the expense of the content' – will not work for this sort of film whose aesthetic project is the polar opposite, indeed the critique of *Movie* assumptions.²²

The films of Godard (also of Eisenstein, Vertov, Makavejev, Straub, Marker, Rocha, some of the underground) disjoin the codes of cinema from the strictly non-cinematic, the events before the camera which camera and lighting modify and transform. These films present a conflict in the film text, or, more precisely, locate contradictions between, in *Movie* terms 'device' and 'content'. These films neither 'reveal' reality, as Perkins might argue for Preminger, nor do they strictly analyse reality, the events filmed.

140 Rather do they pose the problem of analysis of the material, the codes by which the film text is constructed – it is the problems of film-making which are raised and inscribed in the text.²³

Nothing could be further from an understanding of *Vivre sa Vie* than V. F. Perkins' . . .

His (Godard's) manner of insisting on the absence of a visible pattern comes close to suggesting the presence of one that is invisible.

Such deliberation is in the chaos of the surface, so emphatic is the conjunction of incompatible elements, that the film seems to aspire to a level of vision at which everything would become intelligible and coherent.²⁴

When *Movie* critics turned their attention to more 'modernist' film-makers, they searched for a patterning of elements, a structure, that was, quite simply, not there – conjunction in the film text between the codes of cinema and *mise-en-scène*, a conjunction which these film-makers explicitly dislocated.²⁵ Many, like Paul Mayersberg and Robin Wood, discovered what they searched after, found a presence in an absence. Others, like V. F. Perkins, clearly recognised the absence, the gaps, fragmentations, dis-harmonies, and were unsympathetic.

The lack of sympathy or the persistent misreadings were a consequence of *Movie's* critical assumptions, a refusal to question these and an often blatant empiricism and hostility to ideas.

I do not want to say anything particularly new or to provide a defence of our views. Our only defence is that our approach seems to work when actually applied to films.²⁶

Only that and nothing more. The need to attend closely to the film text became a kind of *Movie* fetish – 'the best antidote to the prevalent wooliness about the cinema seemed to us to lie in detailed, descriptive criticism'.²⁷ *Movie* published few general articles, no theoretical ones, in ten years of its existence. It shunned ideas in criticism, or any self-consciousness about ideas as it often did in movies – 'Hawks is not really a modern artist. . . . He is a survivor from the past, whose work has never been afflicted with (the) disease of self-consciousness'.²⁸

Free from such infection, *Movie* remained inoculated against new ideas either in films or criticism, and thereby cut off from any possibility of altering or significantly developing its positions, unlike, for example, *Cahiers du Cinema*. The coincidence between *Movie* criticism and impulses in *Cahiers* was superficial and short-lived. Ian Cameron is correct to separate *Movie* from the French journal.

The arrival of an English-language magazine which made out a case for taking Hollywood products seriously was bound to lead

a lot of critics to the almost automatic conclusion that *Cahiers* now had a branch in London. But *Movie*'s appearance was prompted not so much by ideas from abroad as by the absence of them at home.²⁹

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Cahiers, from its beginning, did theorise, absorbed and re-worked structures of ideas developed in philosophy, aesthetics, anthropology and inscribed these ideas into the analysis of film. *Movie* remained where it began, locked into close empirical description with little better to rely on than intuition and sensibility.

The film critic's raw materials – apart from his own intelligence – are his observations in the cinema: what he sees, hears and feels. By building up our theses about films from these observations, we are going through the same processes as the audience, although, of course, our reactions are conscious whereas those induced in the cinema, particularly at the first viewing of a film, tend to be reached unconsciously. We believe that our method is likely to produce criticism which is closer, not just to objective description of the film itself, but to the spectator's experience of the film.³⁰

In July 1972 V. F. Perkins published *Film as Film*, a rigorous, coherent explication and rationale of his own critical position and to an extent a resumption of ideas in *Movie*, but now organised and made explicit.

Film as Film is *not* the theorisation of *Movie*. Absent is the Leavisite moralism of Robin Wood, the overt empiricism of Ian Cameron, the flirtation with modernism by Paul Mayersberg. But Perkins was a member of the *Movie* board, his ideas connect him with other *Movie* critics, and his book, in its rationalisation of certain central *Movie* concerns of the 1960's, only makes sense in the context of the *Movie* tradition.

Perkins, in *Movie*, always appeared more single-minded than the other critics in his commitment to the popular Hollywood movie and in his lack of sympathy for films outside that tradition. The commitment is reiterated in *Film as Film* and the tradition to which it relates defined.

... the enormous diversity of content and method to be found among even the most popular movies.

They are readily linked by what they are *not*. None of them makes extensive demands on the spectator's intellect. The dialogue and action of each of them is fully understandable without specialised knowledge of political mechanisms, sociological jargon, philosophical concepts or historical facts. None of them employs a form so radically new as to require a substantial re-adjustment of the spectator's attitude. There is nothing in plot or presentation to baffle anyone who keeps pace with the

142 developing conventions of mid-century, mid-Atlantic popular culture. Where a particular knowledge is required – then it is part of *the common knowledge of common man*. The spectator does not have to work for his pleasure.³¹ (My italics.)

The claims I have advanced for the fiction film depend on our seeing and valuing it as a synthetic process whose conventions allow the creation of forms in which *thought and feeling are continually related to our common experience of the world*.³² (My italics).

This ideology of the common experience is supported by a critical aesthetic, insistent on the need to maintain the 'reality', the credibility of the fictional world on the screen. The reality of the fiction here is its likeness, resemblance as a world to the real world of actual objects and human experience – 'a film remains credible so long as we are not led to question the *reality* of the objects and events presented'.³³

Perkins condemns any disruption of the fictional world, any indication that it is a construct, a discourse made by someone. Such disruption by, for example, aesthetic device not linked to dramatic action and therefore visible as device, would be a loss in realism and hence a destruction of the fiction – 'the spectator's belief in the action will decrease or disappear'.³⁴

Events and action filmed by the camera are always constructed for the application of the codes of cinema. This is true even in documentary. The process of selecting what is to be filmed is 'made' and what occurs on the screen constitutes not a real event but a discourse constructed and told by someone. Perkins' view which presupposes a synthesis between event and presentation, action and device, neither accepts their analytic distinction nor a cinematic practice which might divorce them and place them in a contradictory relation.

The perception of the narrative of a film as real, that is, as *really* being a narrative, has as a consequence the de-realisation of the thing told by the narrative.³⁵ This is a perfectly acceptable fictional mode (and documentary mode), indeed, one evident in the film-makers whom Perkins applauds eg Hitchcock, Renoir. Perkins' demand that the thing told in the fiction be real (both undisturbed by evident artistic device, directorial intrusion and homologous to the actual world) is an exceedingly narrow idea of fiction and a misapprehension of the relation between concrete reality and film. The camera does not simply 'record' or 'reveal' the pro-filmic material prepared by the director. That material is modified and analysed by the application to it of the codes of cinema. 'Furthermore, what is that reality which is supposed to be revealed, as it cannot be the concrete reality one can see without the camera?'³⁶

The project of *Film as Film* is to offer a 'synthetic' theory of cinema which relates primarily to the Hollywood film of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and then only to a handful of directors who realise Perkins' ideal of form and content, reality and illusion, perfectly integrated. That aesthetic probably never existed in the form which Perkins offers, and which, in any case, no longer operates, even in Hollywood, except among a very few, very conservative figures.

A critical theory of *the cinema* based so narrowly and one of whose functions is the rejection both of the immediate present (Godard) and the distant past (Eisenstein) is suspect on this, if on no other grounds.³⁷ In effect, Perkins cannot deal with *the cinema*, and where he can, his competence seems confined to a few *auteurs* – Hitchcock, Preminger, Brooks, Minelli.

Perkins' method is truly synthetic, that is, not analytic, generalising rather than specifying.³⁸ Directors in turn are judged as unifiers of action and presentation, or not. From that is generalised a virtual ecstasy of coherence and synthesis, the task of criticism to unfold. Neither narrative forms, nor dramatic structures, or aesthetic devices are distinguished or analysed. Instead . . .

The hallmark of a great movie is not that it is without strains but that it *absorbs* its tensions . . . they achieve *simultaneous* relevance on the planes of action, thought and feeling. Cause and effect become *inseparable*.

The great film approaches *an intensity of cohesion* such that its elements do not operate solely to maintain or further the reality of the fictional world, nor solely to decorative, affective or rhetorical effect . . .

At the level of detail we can value most the moments when narrative, concept and emotion are *most completely fused*. Extended and shaped throughout the whole picture, such moments *compose a unity* between record, statement and experience. At this level too, *sustained harmony and balance* ensure that the view contained in the pattern of events may be enriched by the pattern of our involvement. When such *unity* is achieved, observation, thought and feeling are *integrated*: film becomes the projection of a mental universe – a mind recorder. *Synthesis here, where there is no distinction between how and what, content and form*, is what interests us if we are interested in film as film. It is that *unity* to which we respond when film as fiction makes us sensitive to film as film.³⁹ (My italics.)

What appeared in the mid-1960's as new, an innovation, ends now as Romantic parody. The strain of Perkins' conservatism is evident in the rhetoric of his prose, a kind of incantation. It is no easy task to exclude the last decade of cinema, to ignore modern theory and to reject most of the past.

1. Realism was dominant particularly in the visual arts though less so in literature and criticism. The aestheticising and formal-stylistic concerns of Bloomsbury and of a number of film critics had little effect, however, on the production of art in Britain, though considerable effect on the reception of the European avant-garde in this country.
2. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, New York, 1954, p18.
3. *Ibid*, pp23-4.
4. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, revised edition, Seckor & Warburg, London, 1972, p171.
5. See especially Lindsay Anderson, 'The Films of Alfred Hitchcock', *Sequence* 9, Autumn 1949, also Forsyth Hardy, ed, *John Grierson on Documentary*, p109. 'But when, oh, when, will Hitchcock get a theme that will match his powers of production? This (*The Skin Game*) has all the air of being more important than the previous ones but when you come to think of it, what a shallow and contemptible theme it is!'
6. Hardy, ed, *Ibid*, p157.
7. *Ibid*, p189ff.
8. Lindsay Anderson, 'A Possible Solution', *Sequence* 3, Spring 1948. 'It is today impossible to make films which will appeal to a moronic mass audience (critics should be compelled to spend their Sunday evenings sitting in front of cinema queues, just looking at them), and at the same time be good'.
9. Anderson, *op cit*, 'The Films of Alfred Hitchcock'.
10. Victor Perkins, 'The British Cinema' in *Movie Reader*, ed, Ian Cameron, November Books, London, 1972, p8.
11. *Ibid*, p11.
12. *Ibid*, p10.
13. Victor Perkins, 'Why Preminger?', *Movie Reader*, p43.
14. Robin Wood, *Howard Hawks*, London, 1968, p48.
15. Wollen, *op cit*, p169.
16. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, Baltimore, 1953. See part 4 ('Linguistic Theory and Induction').
17. Wood, *op cit*, p10-11.
18. Robin Wood, 'La Baie des Anges', *Movie Reader*, p117.
19. 'Movie Differences', *Movie Reader*, p21.
20. *Ibid*, p21.
21. Wollen, *op cit*, pp164-5.
22. 'Movie Differences', p19 (Perkins).
23. Wollen, *op cit*, pp164-5.
24. V. F. Perkins, 'Vivre Sa Vie' in *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard*, ed, Ian Cameron, London, 1967, pp36-7.
25. *Movie* did engage with the European, Indian and Japanese Cinema (Oshima, Ray, Makavejev, etc) but 'read' them in terms of *Movie* assumptions based primarily on Hollywood.
26. Ian Cameron, 'Films, Directors and Critics', *Movie Reader*, p12.
27. Ian Cameron, 'Introduction', *Movie Reader*, p6.
28. Wood, *Hawks*, p11.
29. Cameron, 'Introduction', *op cit*, p6.
30. Cameron, 'Films, Directors and Critics', *op cit*, pp12-13.
31. V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Penguin Books, London, 1972, p162.
32. *Ibid*, p187.
33. *Ibid*, p66.
34. *Ibid*, p77.
35. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinema*, Paris, 1971, p30. 'C'est donc que la perception du récit comme réel - c'est-à-dire

comme étant réellement un récit – a pour conséquence immédiate d'irréaliser la chose-racontée. 145

36. Paul Willemen, 'Scenography vs Spontaneity', unpublished *Screen* paper, p7.
37. *Film as Film*, pp104-5, 190.
38. Hjelmslev, *op cit*.
39. *Film as Film*, pp131-33.

Victor Perkins

Thank you for sending me the galleys of your article and for offering me the opportunity of an immediate reply. I welcome your actions as evidence of your desire to engage with the issues raised by *Film as Film*. I wish only that I could welcome the text of your article in the same way. But words, on this occasion, speak louder than actions.

None of the arguments in *Film as Film* is presented or debated, and scornful characterisations are offered in place of rebuttal. I invite your readers to check the truth of this assertion. What they cannot check without reading the book is that you also misrepresent many of my views and on some crucial issues assign beliefs to me which are precisely the reverse of those stated, indeed emphasised, in *Film as Film*.

I wish to make clear that I do not think your misreading of my book, while very extensive, is a reflection on your sincerity. I think the most likely explanations are these: a premature commitment (see your editorial in *Screen* vol 13 no 3) to a complex of ideas whose applicability to the cinema is at best highly problematical and at worst (as formulated in the translated *Cahiers* editorials) obscure and contradictory; a related failure to recognise that aesthetic positions must be in part matters of choice, involving value judgements which cannot be categorised as correct or erroneous; and, lastly, your interesting but totally misconceived pursuit of the hidden coherence in the chain, British Culture – 'realism' – F. R. Leavis – *Movie* (and all its contributors' writings when and wherever published) – *Film as Film*. This last results in the falsification of each of the terms, eg your misuse of evidence about or derived from F. R. Leavis.

And it most convincingly accounts for your failure to see that *Film as Film* in some respects presents not a refinement but a renunciation of ideas which I expressed in *Movie*. You identify my work as *Movie* at its best, and it would be delightful to be able to accept that description. But when I review my contributions there it is clear that I was sometimes naive, uninformed yet dog-

matic, in a way which could not be alleged of my colleagues. (I'm not completely draped in sackcloth – some of my ideas were good.) So the process of completing *Film as Film* was partly one of reviewing my preconceptions in the light of my colleagues' and others' demonstrations of inadequacy. Thus, for example, Paul Mayersburg made a (to me, at least) very convincing exposure of some of the prejudices I displayed in the *Movie* 'Differences' discussion, and to that extent *Film as Film* owes more to his contributions there than to my own. (Something similar would be true of my approach to *Vivre Sa Vie* in that discussion and my much more sympathetic and responsible treatment of it in *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard*.)

But you imagine an uninterrupted line of development from some of my worst ideas in *Movie* to *Film as Film*. For example, I invoke the notion of a 'natural harmony' or abstract unity between event and presentation in the *Movie* discussion and even, marginally, in the Godard book. Eventually I saw that this notion was metaphysical, self-mystifying and, in fact, daft. Yet you claim that in *Film as Film* 'Directors are judged as unifiers of action and presentation, or not'. What *Film as Film* actually asserts is that there can be no such thing, whoever directs, as a *disunity* between action and presentation. In other words I do indeed as you also but incompatibly remark 'presuppose a synthesis between event and presentation' (if it's presupposed it cannot function as a criterion) because actions exist in films only as they are presented. I say further that one of the sources of value in the movies is the production of meaningful interaction between event and image – they will always be together but they *may* be mutually illuminating'.

This bears on the most crucial difference between some of my *Movie* contributions and *Film as Film*. The latter is, as far as I know, the *first attempt at an aesthetic and evaluative theory of film* which is not prescriptive – or to be precise which makes the one minimum demand which any evaluative theory must make: coherence. Some of my *Movie* work is dogmatically prescriptive. Only at a late stage in the production of *Film as Film* did I realise the necessity of clarifying and eliminating a basic assumption absorbed from 'essence of cinema' theories from the earliest up to Bazin and Kracauer – that an aesthetic theory has to define what *the medium* allows or prohibits. I then set out to 'help to develop the disciplines of criticism without seeking to lay obligations on the film-maker', and the book was completely overhauled in this light. To the extent that the published *Film as Film* retains any traces of the prescriptive formulations of my first drafts (minor but not blameless inflections of tone in discussing the details of some examples) those remnants are clearly inconsistent with the whole drive of the book's argument. I could not have objected if you had seized upon them.

But instead you see the book as being designed to 'exclude' (the last decade of cinema) and 'reject' (most of the past, the immediate present, the distant past). This is to such a degree incompatible with my repeatedly declared project that, if it were true, it would be generous to the point of irresponsibility to call *Film as Film* 'rigorous, coherent'. I can only assume that the idea of non-prescriptive evaluation is as new to you as it was to me, and that this novelty combined with your assumption of a continuity in my attitudes to blind you to my actual statement.

For instance, you say that it is one of the book's functions to reject Godard and Eisenstein. There are three references to Godard in *Film as Film*. Two of them are clearly comments of approval. The third is a recognition that Godard does not situate *Les Carabiniers* within the discipline which I have tried to define, and that therefore 'the degree to which *Les Carabiniers* is to be valued will have to be argued in terms other than those proposed here' (p190). Is this a rejection of Godard? It was intended to be a recognition of the necessary limits of my *theory*, to avoid the pretence that *Film as Film* offers criteria which are universally applicable to all fiction films.

My 'rejection' of Eisenstein is the examination of three shots (the famous stone lion) in *The Battleship Potemkin*. I offer a detailed criticism of these shots (later summarised as 'inconsistent with the discipline which Eisenstein had himself established') and you might have shown where my argument is faulty, but not without taking account of the following: 'These objections to Eisenstein's usage seem valid and serious. But they are not presented as very damaging criticisms of either the director or his film . . . a momentary flaw. . . . My quarrel is rather with those who have presented this device, and others like it, as models of creative editing . . .' (p105). Is this a rejection of Eisenstein? It is certainly the nearest approach to harshness in the book's references to him. Let me state unequivocally that *Film as Film* was not intended to provide theoretical support for attacks on films like *October* and *Vent d'Est*. I am in fact (it is not relevant to *Film as Film*'s arguments) uncertain of the status of these works because I am unsure how we could define the discipline within which they operate. Without such a definition it is impossible to organise hypotheses and complete the selection of criteria so as to constitute *theoretical* support for a judgement.

On the other hand, and as a very distinct issue, it is not a criticism but a tautology to say of an evaluative theory that some artists emerge without glory when we apply its proposals.

The Eisenstein and Godard pictures would of course be amendable to a theoretical approach, and there would probably be some overlap between its criteria and those which I have argued as applicable to a different form – the 'conventional' narrative movie. But between the medium of cinema and its various forms there is

a distinction so crucial that I emphasise it time and again in *Film as Film*. You ignore this in saying, as if it were an unrecognised defect, that my theory 'cannot deal with *the cinema*'. My theory denies the practicability of presenting criteria which hold good for every type of film. I believe, and state, that a longing for an all-embracing aesthetic of *the cinema* is the worst part of our inheritance from the major theorists, and a symptom of the immaturity of the discipline of film criticism. Did I not express this clearly?

I do not believe that film (or any other medium) has an essence which we can usefully invoke to justify our criteria. . . . Standards of judgement cannot be appropriate to a medium as such but only to particular ways of exploiting its opportunities. . . . We can evolve useful criteria only for specific types of film, not for the cinema. . . . A theory of film which claims universal validity must provide either an exhaustive catalogue of film forms or a description of the medium in such general terms as to offer minimal guidance to the appreciation of any movie. . . . The critical problem is to arrive at descriptions which are both specific and comprehensive enough to be useful. . . . The most significant limitations are those of the form rather than of the medium, the disciplines which the film-maker obeys in order to pursue a particular range of opportunities. (pp59-62).

Do you really look for a theory of *the cinema* whose criteria will comprehend *La Règle du Jeu*, *Othon*, *The Bugs Bunny Show* and *The Modern Coal Burning Steam Locomotive*? I do not, and for that reason I defined a more modest – or sensible – project. I was scrupulous about emphasising its limitations but in the context of your misunderstanding I must here be emphatic about its range. 'The Hollywood film of the late 1950's and early 1960's' is not an isolated freak; a theory which provides the tools for its understanding and judgement will function equally effectively for most of the films I have seen by Antonioni, Bresson, Chabrol, Dwan, Edwards, Feuillade, Griffith, Huston, Ince, Jewison, Kazan, Lubitsch, Mizoguchi, Nichols, Ophuls, Pabst, Quine, Renoir, Sirk, Tati, Ulmer, Visconti, Welles, (Dammit), Young and Zeffirelli. My choice of illustration for my argument does no more than 'reflect areas of my own enthusiasm and knowledge' (p7). Ian Cameron has suggested with a keener perception that the selection was a *tactical* error and he is probably right, but that does not bear on the validity of the theory. What would you think of a claim that a symphonic theory which derived most of its examples from Haydn, Beethoven and Brahms was thereby disqualified from relevance to Mozart, Schubert and Dvorak?

Moreover, if my theory were applicable *only* to Hitchcock, Preminger, Brooks and Minnelli (a nonsense proposition) but were thoroughly and illuminatingly applicable to them, it would neces-

150 sarily be a very valuable contribution to aesthetics. (That is not, I grant, quite the constraint you indicate, but then you personalise the issue in terms of my 'competence' and there's no way I can answer that.)

On the matter of limitations, then, we're left with your assertion that *Film as Film's* 'aesthetic probably never existed in the form which Perkins offers'. You follow that with an attempt to repossess the cake you've just eaten, but ignoring that – and the evasive deployment of the word 'probably' – what can you possibly mean by the non-'existence' of an aesthetic? That no film-maker ever conceived what he was doing in terms like these:

The fictional film exploits, where purer forms attempt to negate, the conflict between reality and illusion. Instead of trying exclusively either to create or to record, the story film attempts a synthesis: it both records what has been created and creates by its manner of recording (p62).

The moving image lends its immediacy and conviction, its concreteness of credible detail, to the fictional world. But at this point the film-maker confronts the limitation that accompanies opportunity. If he chooses to exploit the credibility of the recording, he thereby sacrifices some of the freedom to invent and arrange which is offered by the celluloid strip. The discipline is inherent in the attempt to create from a succession of images an apparently solid world which exists in its own right (p69)?

Or are you saying that the following cannot be applied to any film you've seen:

The narrative picture, in most of its forms, submits to the twin criteria of order and credibility. The movie itself creates these criteria whenever it proposes to be at the same time significant and convincing. The impurity of the medium is consummated by a decision to project a world which is both reproduced and imagined, a creation and a copy (pp69-70)?

Lastly, a comment on your two major quotations – on which, since you do not attempt to argue, you are presumably aiming an appeal at common sense, common knowledge or common experience. The first (note 31) does *not* reiterate a commitment or define a tradition. Its context is simply an attempt to indicate the constraints within which most film-makers work: '... The director's problem is thus to stay close enough to the conventions to be comprehensible while deviating from expectations sufficiently to be interesting' (p163). If you find the quoted statement objectionable, it must be simple to refute: you have only to name the indisputably popular film which does indeed demand of its audience 'specialised knowledge', 'substantial readjustment' etc.

The second selection (note 39) comes from the three pages

which climax the development of the book's argument. They summarise and celebrate its conclusions and they were certainly not designed, in context, to depress the reader. But even as condensed and italicised (did you not think the rhetoric showed sufficient strain without the italics?) I find nothing to regret or correct unless it be your elision which makes 'they' in the first paragraph seem to refer, nonsensically, to 'tensions'. But isn't it indicative of the insecurity of your argument that you devote so much space to a – distinctly Leavisian – appeal against *tone* rather than substance?

I cannot enumerate all your misreadings and confusions (about the book and about the cinema). I'll respond to any invitation to give more detail on these and I undertake to join *Screen* in an examination of the book's definitions and hypotheses as soon as you equip yourself to deal with them as they are stated. My first contribution, once we've eliminated misreadings, would be to expose and try to define those aspects with which I am myself dissatisfied. I have suggested that your attack on *Film as Film* does not in fact make sense but can best be explained in the context of your attempt to protect a fantasy of 'British culture'. I imagine others may wish to comment on this as it affects F. R. Leavis and *Movie Reader*. As I see it, the mistakes are similar but there is less to excuse them.

TV Documentary and Ideology –
a reply to Nicholas Garnham

Charles Parker

Dear Sir,

Nicholas Garnham's article on TV Documentary in your summer (*Screen* Vol 13 n 2) issue commands respect, as a serious attempt to analyse what he, I think rightly, assesses as a creative failure. It is challenging; it is also infuriating, since he raises a succession of fundamental issues – only to deal with them perfunctorily!

Take for instance, his first main point – 'To be unaware of the ideological significance of aesthetic modes is characteristic of our philistine tradition . . .', yet the recently issued pamphlet *Principle & Practice in Documentary Programmes* shows that BBC Television service is very much aware! for instance:

A great deal of documentary information . . . is conveyed by . . . a whole range of techniques such as juxtaposition in editing, uncommon angles, lenses which distort or caricature . . . in fact the tools of his (the producer's) craft. Without freedom to use them, documentary as a creative art would be impossible. Yet if he is dealing with a subject of high public concern, the producer has . . . to subordinate his own particular bias . . . and use these devices solely to add clarity and illumination and meaning. . . . (p27).

This surely demonstrates that Television Centre knows that film technique is not neutral! It also reveals, as does the whole pamphlet in its somewhat desperate defence of BBC impartiality, a fear lurking behind all that smooth establishment frontage. The fear that the tools are of their nature subversive, and must therefore be hedged round by every available safety device, to stop the microphone or the camera blowing the gaff, and giving the audience an 'in' on reality.

Mr Garnham, of course, acknowledges that these constraints are applied. What he does not seem to me to give sufficient weight to is the essential dialectic of the broadcasting authority's position – that the tools which they so assiduously seek to circumscribe are continually breaking out of their charmed circle, and doing this precisely *because* of the 'recording function of film or television'.

Because it is precisely the impact of real people living in a real world which is subversive of authority; and in equating reality with actuality with at its most perjorative the 'slice of life', Mr Garnham goes off at a tangent I believe. It is the compulsive representationalism of current documentary practice that is so deadening, not its realism. It is the refusal of the official documentary to confront actuality, and allow the camera and the tape recorder to reveal the forms that actuality makes mandatory,

which rules out progress. And it is confusing the issue to argue 153
'complete naturalism' as the enemy.

Dürer once remarked that as he matured as an artist, he abandoned the elaborate style he had admired in his youth, and aspired to the simple, direct representation of nature. 'It was so easy and so tempting,' he observed, 'to deviate from nature'. (Ruskin on the Pre-Raphaelites.)

Consider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly positive the picture) – this reproduction is achieved by seeing into the heart of a thing . . . is realism in fact; though being pursued by means of the imagination, it is confounded with the imaginative which is pursued by the same means. (Thomas Hardy in a letter November 20, 1880.)

But the point surely about the increasing sophistication and unobtrusive mobility of cameras and tape recorders, is that the journalist takes them over and exploits them solely as information gatherers. This is the current philistinism; and the grotesque contradiction is that such journalists then endeavour to employ emotive or 'manipulative' techniques in presentation to completely muddy the pool and leave the audience utterly confused (all that ominous or portentous music around every news or current affairs programme for example). Whilst the 'artists' are illusion-creating like mad (or is Z Cars *really* what the police are like?)

The trouble really is that British documentary still goes all out to capture processes, not people; despite the example of Dennis Mitchell and Philip Donnellan – (or perhaps *because* of their example). The documentary film director does not *listen* to the people he is filming. The basic attitude is still that of the ornithologist seeking to observe wild life from his hide; the fact that the people he is observing are sentient, articulate human beings, perfectly capable of demonstrating their expertise in their particular area of living, or of being creative partners in the enterprise, not mute enactors, this is still not perceived and alas Mr Garnham is part of this scene.

Because a most crucial expression of bourgeois individualism is this presumption that life of itself cannot provide a necessary poetry, that this must be supplied by the creative writer/producer as something *applied*. So that although Mr Garnham quotes Marcuse's telling phrase about poetic language depending on the transcendent elements in ordinary language, I don't think he really believes in its absolute relevance – or rather that he does not seem to distinguish between the class sources of such language. In my experience, limited largely to sound documentary – notably the Radio Ballads – such poetry is immanent only in the language of the working class, hardly, if ever, in that of the middle class.

154 This is a most unpalatable truth for us 'educated' ones to swallow, however twenty-five years' experience forces me to assert it as incontestable.

But we never *see* this working class poetic capacity given expression in television documentary! This 'slice of life' is never *this* life, or if it is – it is carefully insulated from us by the label 'character'. And the use of such language (and all that goes with it visually as well as aurally) involves much more than the use of wild track and the developed dialectic between sound track and picture. It requires a belief in the existence of this potential poetry and its recognition and extension when found. For all his immense achievement in breaking new ground, Dennis Mitchell never seemed fully to acknowledge this, or only in the way-out, off-beat areas where he did his best work. One sometimes suspects that his concern with the working class was only as the most suffering class, never as the most creative class. . . . Now I get the feeling that Mr Garnham really seems to be arguing for the replacement of one tyranny by another! Consider this contradiction for instance. He quotes Marx and 'a social structure in which the process of production dominates man, instead of being controlled by him'. Transferred to a documentary context this analysis is equally valid for the Capitalist use of mass media production techniques. Men as the subjects of documentary, are not allowed to control in any way the form in which they are represented (or misrepresented) to their fellows. And in Mr Garnham's dispensation, are they likely to find emancipation? –

We must return to the idea of those early documentary makers and theorists in revolutionary Russia, who saw documentary . . . as an abstract process, a process of thought, of *mastery* of everyday reality not slavery to it. . . .

What is this but the re-assertion of an external aesthetic upon reality, and an aesthetic which will inevitably be middle class and dictated by the classical and literary traditions (since it is precisely this 'reality' of cinema which is the only basis of an alternative aesthetic).

What is this but the re-assertion of an external aesthetic upon reality? Because, even making allowances for his – I think – rather questionable evaluation of Eisenstein et al, there is enough of truth in it to be disturbing, certainly of the way these early theorists had to deal with sound-track. For all the revolutionary context and real achievement of such pioneers, the cinema they fathered remains, at root, still held in the classical and literary traditions of the middle-class. And this, I believe, is what Mr Garnham will find himself re-asserting if he has his way.

Yours sincerely, CHARLES PARKER.

Dear Sir,

May I thank you for the care and general fidelity with which *Screen*

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Yours sincerely, CHARLES PARKER.

Dear Sir,

May I thank you for the care and general fidelity with which *Screen*

has deciphered the tapes of our colloquy, and also for the comprehensive notes you have added? 155

Nevertheless, besides the interviewees incurable tendency to drift into obscurity, there do remain occasional slips and omissions, mainly due no doubt to my inexperience of gossiping into a microphone or to incompatibility between the machine's capacity and my enunciation. Since such value as the series of recollections has is for record. I should be grateful, if you can spare the space, for opportunity to put right a few.

page 74: In your question: not *LFS*. The Film Society, which we were speaking of did operate in London, but the London Film Society (LFS) was something later and different.

page 77 and your note 12: Not the American *Shadows* but the German *Warning Shadows*, with Alexander Granach.

page 80: Not 'Danston audiences', but 'Granada audiences'. The questionnaire was conducted by the Granada Cinema chain.

page 94: In my strictures on the US reprints I should have remembered that though the OED justified my terminology I do not know what Webster says about it. For the sake particularly of any American readers, maybe we should emphasise more clearly that the practice is, in the USA, wholly lawful.

page 95: Two cinemas have become confused together. The Cosmo, Glasgow, one of the earliest specialised 'art' cinemas in Britain (perhaps the second) was a good customer of PFI but had no other connections with it. Later a season of our films was given at the Forum in Villiers Street, under Charing Cross Station, before it was destroyed by bombs. During the war those of our staff who were left helped to run a season of Soviet films at the Tatler in Charing Cross Road.

page 96: 'The Party man who was running the campaign against the Chamberlain Government'. I don't know how this mysterious *singular* being has taken shape through the microphone. Of course the campaign was run by all of us in the Party for all we were worth, not to say also thousands, even millions, of others, as anyone who looks at the press of those days can verify. Far from setting the pace, we were hard put to keep up with it and be brightest at it. Hence some of us conceived the idea of the film.

page 99: Masses in old Russia 'remote from radio or TV': of course this was meant to mean 'remote in time from . . .'

page 105: The whole phrase *the Story of a Simple Case* constitutes the title of the film.

page 110 (your note 10): You share my admiration for the *Secrets of Nature* series. But in recalling it we should surely have identified and acclaimed Percy Smith, creator of it all.

Thank you again,

Yours sincerely, IVOR MONTAGU.